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Zombie Style

Zombies. Who doesn't love 'em? And while we're at it, what about vampires?

Both of these classic monsters have seen a renaissance in recent years in Hollywood and literature (although calling some of these books "literature" is a stretch). And why not? They're both badass. But before Twilight and *World War Z*, before the *Vampire Diaries* and *28 Days Later*, Dungeons & Dragons did vampires and zombies, and it did them well.

Many times, the game has borrowed from the most classic versions of these tropes. Count Strahd von Zarovich is the best example, of course, easily reminiscent of the Lugosi-era Dracula. Zombies have shown up so frequently that they've become classic staples of D&D's early levels. You could almost run an entire heroic-tier campaign featuring nothing but zombies!

We can take a page from Hollywood's book with both of these, and other, classic monsters, and revisit them from time to time. There's something just . . . awesome about a good vampire adventure. There's something primally frightening about a monster that wants to kill you by draining your blood. Hollywood would also have us believe there's something erotic about blood draining, but I ain't buyin' it. Being dead kind of puts a damper on sexy in my book.

Vampires are sneaky, charming, and deadly, but worst of all, they look like normal humans (unless you're making a movie where they glitter—ugh). Anyone you run into on a dark street corner could theoretically be a vampire, and it's that feeling of unknown danger that makes the monsters so awesome.

Zombies come at us from a similar place in the fear spectrum, but with one important distinction. Once more, these are creatures that were once human. They're more grotesque, rather than more sparkly, but utterly lacking in the emotional responses that make a human, well, human. Unlike vampires, who are often hundreds of years old and unknown to their enemies until they start sucking people dry, zombies are people you knew. That adds just the right twist to a good zombie story. Best of all, zombies just keep coming, and if they get you, they recruit you.

I think zombies have been given short shrift in our game in recent years. As I stated before, you can't shake a stick without hitting a heroic-tier adventure that features zombies in some capacity or another, but I think they deserve a chance to really shine on their own. That's why this month, you'll find a real horror-movie-style zombie adventure, set in the Chaos Scar.

"Dead by Dawn" starts with the same premise as the classic George Romero movies *Night of the Living Dead* and *Dawn of the Dead*. We've tried to capture some of what makes these classic zombie experiences terrifying. The characters have to hole up in an old, abandoned structure and survive the night against an endless assault of zombies. Of course, we add our own unique D&D spin on things, complete with appearances by the game's own twist on zombies.

I'm hoping that "Dead by Dawn" strikes as much of a chord with you as it did with me. Because I'm hoping that if the demand is there, I get to commission more adventures playing on other classic horror tropes. The Mummy, the Wolfman, heck, maybe even a good-old-fashioned Dracula romp—they're primed and waiting for their chance on center stage.

Which classic horror trope do you think would make the best Dungeons & Dragons adventure? Which do you think would be the most fun to play or run? Send your feedback to dndinsider@wizards.com!

An Adventure for Characters of Levels 1-3

illustration by Howard Lyon
cartography by Jered Blando

HEROIC
1-10

Cross City Race

By James "Grim" Desborough

The Best Adventure I Never Wrote

As D&D 3rd Edition rode off into the sunset, Wizards ran a competition for our freelancers, asking them to present the ideas for the adventures that they had always wanted to write but had never done so for one reason or another. Those short synopses were voted on, and the eventual winner from the freelancer submissions was this, "Cross City Race!"

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Introduction

This adventure is designed to be a 'side quest', a break from more typical adventures and dungeon delving.

It begins with the characters arriving within a city where a great fair and revel are in progress. The city is alive with talk about a race that forms part of these celebrations and which engages the town's interest like little else. The race is held every year on the same day.

The goal is to take a letter from the southern gate to the northern watchtower as quickly as possible.

While the race started out as a competition between two message carriers and a celebration of history, it is now open to anyone. There are loose rules about the use of magic and physical violence between competitors but it is, for the most part, a free-for-all with almost anything being considered 'fair'. The race is also open to interference from the citizens. Many bands of children, ruffians, and the bored delight in setting 'traps' for the racers and watching them take a tumble.

The prize for this punishing race is coin and the added inducement of a magical item from the treasury. This year, not only are there material prizes, but the powers that be in the city are looking for a capable runner to take sensitive correspondence between their city and another. The competition proves a method by which they can find the best person for the job, meaning this could be used as an introduction to another plot or adventure for a Dungeon Master needing a good 'hook'.

The adventure can be run with a single player, with multiple players competing against each other and the nonplayer characters, or with one player as the runner and the others providing aid to him and interference to their rivals.

How to Run the Race

The race is made up of a series of skill challenges across a variety of routes, all leading to a final obstacle and the finish line. The number of successes gained demonstrates each racer's position relative to each other on each of the routes. The more successes you get, the faster you're moving; the more failures you get, the slower you're moving and the more trouble you may run into.

Each turn, each racer makes an appropriate skill check. If the check succeeds, then the racer advances along his chosen route. If the check fails, then the racer either remains in place or takes consequences, depending on the challenge. The racer who reaches the end of the route first is the winner and claims the reward, bringing the race to a close.

It's best to run the adventure fairly swiftly to keep a sense of impetus and urgency to it. Things will inevitably slow down in combat encounters, but the added jeopardy should keep the tension up in those instances.

Running the Race

Roll Initiative for all the racers as you would for combat. Rounds proceed in this order.

1. The player whose turn it is may try to switch routes, making the roll and taking the consequences. If the switch succeeds, that player proceeds with step 2. Otherwise, that player's turn ends and play jumps to step 3.
2. The player makes a roll for the challenge of the character's current route. With success, the character moves forward to the next appropriate space. With failure, the character remains in place. If the character has accrued enough failures to trigger a consequence, it must be resolved.
3. Play proceeds with the next player in initiative order, starting at step 1. Continue until the race is won!

Complications

Various things can cause complications during the race, mostly when characters interact with each other or with nonplayer characters. The most common of these potential complications are described here. Use these as guidelines if issues arise with similar powers, magic items, and so on.

Changing Routes

If a character is having a hard time with a particular challenge or doesn't like the look of what they're going to be up against, they can elect to change routes with a skill roll. The character retains the successes gained on the previous route when entering the new route or if the skill check failed. A switch can be made only between adjacent routes; a character can't go directly from one roof route to another roof route without dropping down to street level first. Changing routes doesn't end the character's turn if the skill roll succeeds; the character can immediately attempt a roll on the new challenge for the area just entered. If the skill roll to change routes fails, then the character takes the consequences listed below and his turn ends.

Moving from Roof to Street

Getting down from the rooftops to the street below is relatively simple but has the potential to do the character a little harm. A character can reach the street in one of two ways:

- **Jumping down** requires an Acrobatics check against DC 15. If it fails, the character takes 2d10 damage but is not otherwise delayed. The player can make an Acrobatics check to reduce this damage (PHB pg. 181). Succeed or fail, the character is now on the new route.
- **Climbing down** requires an Athletics check against DC 10. If it fails, the character falls and takes 1d10 damage. The player can make an Acrobatics check to reduce this damage. Succeed or fail, the character is now on the new route.

Moving from Street to Roof

Getting from a street route up onto a roof route takes an Athletics check against DC 10. If it fails, the character falls and takes 1d10 damage. The player can make an Acrobatics check to reduce this damage. The character is not switched to the new route, and his turn ends.

Moving from Street to Street

Moving into the Rich Street Route requires a Diplomacy check against DC 15. With a successful roll, the character makes the switch and continues immediately. If the check fails, the character gets caught up in street traffic or is being lectured on rudeness by a merchant; this turn ends and the character skips his next turn entirely, but he can continue on the Rich Street Route on the turn after that.

Moving into the Main Street Route requires a Diplomacy or Streetwise check against DC 15. Failure means that the character gets jostled by the crowd and loses 1d4 hit points from being elbowed and smacked around. Succeed or fail, the character is on the Main Street Route.

Moving into the Poor Street Route requires a Streetwise check against DC 15. Failure means that the character gets shoved to the ground by angry people and misses the next turn. Succeed or fail, the character is on the Poor Street Route.

Sabotage

A character or an NPC can sabotage the race route behind them in several ways. They could drop caltrops, spill oil on the ground, even set traps and snares on the route. These types of tricks affect only characters who are behind the cheater and on the same route. There are too many possibilities to cover all of them specifically, but in general they should have one of two effects:

- **Increase the DC of the skill challenge:** This comes about by somehow modifying existing obstacles; pouring oil down a climbing surface, for example, makes an existing challenge considerably more difficult for those following behind. Sabotaging a skill challenge this way should increase its DC by 2 to 5 points, depending on the nature of the interference.
- **Add an extra skill check:** This sort of effect arises from creating new obstacles or traps in other racers' paths. The new obstacle requires a second skill check before the racer can move on to the next area. Both skill checks can be rolled on the same turn. Once one of the checks succeeds, that skill doesn't need to be checked again, but both skill checks must succeed before the character can advance. This should be a simple check of the appropriate DC with appropriate consequences. A typical, hasty obstacle (vegetable cart overturned on the road, laundry line pulled down to neck height) adds a second skill check which must be made successfully before advancing. An actual trap of some sort (a snare or net, for example) could force a caught character to lose a turn while getting free. Rigging a trap is considerably more time-consuming than upsetting an apple cart, so it's reasonable to make the lead character spend a turn or more (or make some skill checks) in order to lay the trap.

Pushing Effects

Many powers can be used to shift opponents around the battlemat during combat. These can be used creatively while addressing skill challenges during the race. If two characters are in the same skill challenge and at the same number of successes, they are considered to be 'neck and neck' in the race and within each other's 'threat range'. In these circumstances a character may forego their skill roll that turn and instead 'attack' the person who is parallel with them, if appropriate. This knocks away one of the target's successes, forcing them backward in the challenge and on the track.

Racial Abilities

Several races have abilities which could impact skill checks and challenges, as well as some of the complications that have already been covered.

Dwarf

The dwarven Stand Your Ground racial ability should increase their defense against push attacks described above by +2. Dwarves can still use their saving throw against being knocked prone against any circumstance that would cause this to happen.

Eladrin

The Eladrin *fey step* racial power can let a character avoid an obstacle or trap completely by moving past it, or get a free success on the right type of skill check. This represents them leaping forward using their ability. It still takes them their turn to do so, however.

Shifter

The racial ability *razorclaw shifting* allows shifters to run more swiftly when bloodied (along with its usual benefits) for the duration of the race. On appropriate skill checks or challenge rolls, they should get a +1 bonus to represent their increased speed.

Class Powers

Various classes have powers that could interfere with the race in one way or another. The main ones to be concerned with are addressed here. Using these powers takes up that character's turn.

Cleric

Cause Fear: If used successfully, this knocks off a success from a competitor anywhere in the same skill challenge as the fear-causing cleric. The attacked character doesn't need to be adjacent to the attacker. Otherwise, this works the same as pushing, described above.

Command: This can be used against anyone in the same skill challenge as the cleric; the target and the cleric don't need to be adjacent. The target of the *command* can be forced to skip a turn, fail a roll, knocked prone (requiring a turn to get back up again) or pushed back (knocking off one of their successes).

Fighter

Get Over Here: If an ally of yours is one success behind you in the same skill challenge as you, you can haul them up/forward, bringing them to the same success level as you and effectively giving them a free success on the challenge.

Rogue

Topple Over: Attacking with a weapon is against the rules but an unarmed attack could still use this to knock someone prone, delaying them for a turn, though it would also delay you.

Warlock

Ethereal Stride: For the purposes of the skill challenges, this works the same as the Eladrin *fey step* power.

Warlord

Knight's Move: You can inspire someone in the same skill challenge as you to make an extra roll this turn at the cost of your own roll.

Wizard

Icy Terrain: The DC of a skill where slippery ice would be a problem is raised by 2 until the end of your next turn.

Expeditious Retreat: Moving with blinding speed gives you a free success on an appropriate skill check.

Barbarian

Combat Sprint: *Combat sprint* can be used to get a free success on an appropriate skill check, representing the barbarian's ability to move quickly over the terrain.

Druid

Twisting Vines: The DC of a skill check where writhing, tangled terrain would be a problem is raised by +2 until the end of your next turn.

Fleet Pursuit: You can move quickly over the terrain and get a free success on an appropriate skill check.

Warden

Mountain Lion Step: If someone has sabotaged the terrain, thereby increasing the DC, you can ignore that extra difficulty for one skill roll.

Opponents

The characters aren't the only ones running the race. Several other opponents face them, drawn from the town and its surroundings, all with their eye on the treasure at the end.

Dorion Light-Step

Dorion is an elven ranger from the nearby woodlands, venturing out in the world and seeking to make a name for himself. This competition is his chance to see whether he's truly capable in character and ability of taking up the life of an adventurer.

Dorion isn't a cheater. He has a strong moral sense that may even lead him to help people who get into serious trouble near him. He'll use his rope and grapnel for one climbing obstacle and then leave it behind. He may use his daggers to help him climb when his rope has been left behind, granting him a +1 bonus to Athletics checks for climbing.

Elven Fleet-Foot **Level 1 Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid, Elven Ranger **XP 100**

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +3, low-light vision
HP 29; **Bloodied** 14
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14
Speed 7

⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
+6 vs. AC; 2d4 + 3 damage.

⸸ / ➢ **Evasive Strike** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Melee or Ranged 10; +6 vs. AC; 2d4 + 3 damage; the elven fleet-foot can shift up to four squares before or after attacking.

Elven Accuracy (free; encounter)
The elven fleet-foot can reroll an attack roll. It must use the second roll, even if it's lower.

Wild Step
The elf ignores difficult terrain when it shifts.

Alignment Good **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Nature +8, Acrobatics +9
Str 11 (+0) **Dex** 18 (+4) **Wis** 16 (+3)
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 12 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+0)
Equipment: two daggers, leather armor, rope and grapnel

Garth Cooper

Garth is a member of the local watch, young and arrogant and looking to win in order to bump himself up the ranks and to impress a girl he likes very much. He's determined to win and to show off, meaning he may take risks. Being a local, Garth knows how to push the rules to their absolute limit and will not hesitate to do so.

He isn't above a little sabotage, either, including spilling a bag of marbles behind him to make life difficult for those following him, not to mention the public.

Garth's bag of marbles, when scattered, requires an Acrobatic skill check against DC 12 to get through. Failure indicates the character falls prone and loses their turn.

Human Watchman **Level 2 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, Human Fighter **XP 125**

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 40; **Bloodied** 20
AC 18; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14
Speed 6

⊕ **Short sword** (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage. *Effect:* The watchman marks the target until the end of the watchman's next turn.

⸸ **Tide of Iron** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage and the human watchman pushes the target 1 square and can shift 1 square into the square the target vacated.

⸸ **Brutal Cut** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 3d6 + 5 damage.

Get Over Here (move; encounter)
The guardsman can slide a willing target 2 squares to a square that's adjacent to you.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Skills Athletics +10, Endurance +10, Intimidate +6
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 16 (+4) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Equipment: short sword, wrist-buckler, leather armor, bag of marbles

Two-Teeth

Two-Teeth, named after the teeth he lost after being kicked by a wild horse, is a half-orc barbarian who is traveling through here on his way to somewhere else. Spying an opportunity for profit and being accustomed to long-distance running since childhood, he sees this as a chance for some easy money to pay his way across the land.

Two-Teeth is a stereotypical brute. If he thinks he can get away with it, he'll have no compunction about tackling, beating, knocking out, or otherwise interfering with another runner in order to get ahead. The chalk he has patted onto his hands gives him a +1 bonus to Athletics checks that he makes to climb.

Half-Orc Runner **Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, Half-Orc Barbarian **XP 150**

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +1 low-light
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23
AC 19; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 13
Speed 6

⊕ **Brawl** (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage.

⸸ **Bruising Smash** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone.

Combat Sprint (move; encounter)
The runner moves its speed + 4, with a +4 bonus to defenses against opportunity attacks this movement provokes.

Furious Assault (free; encounter)
Trigger: The runner hits with an attack.
The runner's attack deals an extra 1d8 damage.

Half-Orc Resilience
The first time that the runner is bloodied in combat, they gain 5 temporary hit points.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Athletics +10, Endurance +10, Intimidate +6
Str 18 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 13 (+2)

Gazunda

Gazunda is a gnomish rogue, native to the town and determined to win the prize which should be enough to get him "out of this parochial, backwater dump where my inestimable talents are wasted," in his words. Gazunda has many unscrupulous, cunning, clever, devious plans to unleash on anyone foolish enough to follow the same route he does.

Gazunda has a little box of tricks that he intends to use to pepper the route behind him with nasty surprises—provided his little legs can get him ahead of anyone, of course. These include smoke bombs (increase the difficulty of some skill checks by +2) and oil (increases the difficulty of Athletics checks for climbing by +2 or creates a DC 12 slipping hazard for characters entering or leaving a skill challenge area).

Gnomish Trickster	**Level 2 Skirmisher**
Small fey humanoid, Gnome Rogue	**XP 125**
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +2 low-light
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17	
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 13	
Speed 5	
⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 2d4 + 4 damage, or 2d4 + 8 with combat advantage, and the trickster slides the target 1 square.	
⸸ **Blinding Cut** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 2d4 + 4 damage, or 2d4 + 8 with combat advantage, and the target is blinded until the end of the trickster's next turn.	
Fade Away (immediate reaction, when the gnome trickster takes damage; encounter) ✦ **Illusion**	
The trickster becomes invisible until it attacks or until the end of its next turn.	
Great Leap (move; at-will)	
The trickster jumps 7 squares.	
Reactive Stealth	
If the trickster has any cover or concealment when making an initiative check, the trickster may make a Stealth check.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +6, Stealth +6, Thievery +9, Acrobatics +9	
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 14 (+3) **Cha** 15 (+3)
Equipment: Leather armor, dagger, box of dirty tricks	

Tom Burgher

Tom is a local bard, beggar, and acrobat from the town who wants to go on to bigger and better things and thinks that he knows the place well enough to stand a chance of winning if he enters the race. He plans to use his natural agility–and his staff–to make his way across town.

The staff gives him a +1 bonus on skill checks where balance is important.

Human Street Entertainer	**Level 1 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, Human Bard	**XP 100**
Initiative +3	**Senses** Perception +0
HP 29; **Bloodied** 14	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Quarterstaff** (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+6 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Blunder** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Arcane, Charm, Implement**	
Ranged 5; +4 vs. Will; 1d6 + 5 damage and the entertainer slides the target 2 squares.	
⸸ **Vicious Mockery** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic**	
Ranged 10; +4 vs. Will; 1d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of the entertainer's next turn.	
⸸ **Surprising Shout** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Arcane, Healing, Implement, Psychic**	
Ranged 10; +4 vs. Will; 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the entertainer's next turn.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +7, Acrobatics +6, Athletics +6	
Str 10 (+1)	**Dex** 12 (+1) **Wis** 11 (+0)
Con 13 (+1)	**Int** 14 (+2) **Cha** 18 (+4)
Equipment: Quarterstaff, leather armor	

The Race

The race begins at the southern gate and ends at the top of the northern watchtower. The main road connects those two points directly, but it's also crowded. Winding through alleys is longer but less crowded, while scrambling across roofs is perilous but possibly the speediest of all.

The race commences when the drawbridge at the southern gate falls. It ends when the winner passes their letter to the city elder waiting at the top of the tower. The winning runner is then led out of the tower and presented with his prizes before being wined, dined, and feted as the hero of the hour.

The Prize

This year's prize fund consists of a lacquered coffer filled to the brim with 400 gold pieces and a pair of *surefoot boots* (*Adventurer's Vault* pg. 130) for the winner, as well as free drinks and food for the night of the festival after their win and the admiration of any number of winsome young locals, not to mention the prospect of steady work as couriers on behalf of the city council.

Preliminaries

Before the race starts, the characters can gather information about the history of the race, possible routes, and their opponents.

Registering for the race gives them access to the rules. For everything else, they need to wander around town, scouting out the routes and asking questions about who else is going to be racing.

Race Rules

- Participants in the race must be present two hours after first light at the southern gate.
- Participants must not begin running until the gate portcullis hits the ground.
- Participants may not directly attack another runner with magic or arms. Roughhousing, wrestling, and bare-hands brawling are permitted.
- Participants must travel on foot (or their species equivalent). Mounts, magical travel, flying more than a few feet at a time, and any other forms of movement that the judges deem to be cheating will get the racer disqualified.
- The first one to hand their letter to the town elder at the top of the northern watchtower is the winner and will be awarded the prize. The elder's decision is final in the event of an apparent tie.

Route Information

Basic information about the different race routes can be gathered by making any of the following rolls at DC 10:

Bluff: The character garners useful information about the race by lying, wheedling, and charming their way around town.

Diplomacy: Amiably talking to residents, who are always willing to talk about the race, and to the race organizers gets access to the same, basic information.

Streetwise: Taking to the streets and asking around, as well as having an eye for the urban landscape itself, can reveal the basic information you need to know about the race routes.

Basic Information: The race typically takes place across one of five routes. One of these is across the roofs of the richer half of the city, passing over the magical quarter, the river, and the wealthy quarter before reaching the tower. The street route for the same area winds through the magic shops, the river docks, and the wealthy gardens. The main road is the most direct route; it passes over the bridge and through the market before the finish line. The poorer half of town has a route winding through its dingy back alleys, crossing the river and passing through Halfling Town before reaching the tower. A racer can also take to the roofs in the poor section, scrambling over the ramshackle buildings, the old city wall, and the roofs of Halfling Town before reaching the end.

Deeper information about each route can be garnered using the same skills at DC 15, rolling no more than once for each. Gathering the information will take the rest of the evening. The duty of looking over the routes should be divvied up between the characters.

Rich Street Route: The magic shops have a lot of frontage and strange things going on; running through there can be a bit hazardous. The working barges tie up at the river next to the bridge. Once you're across, you have to cut through the rich people's gardens without getting chased by guards or dogs.

Rich Rooftop Route: You go over the magic shops and teaching buildings; sometimes their experiments go awry and that can make things more difficult. There's no real river crossing, but the bigger boats tie up at that part of the river. Then you're on the rich people's roofs, and they can get nasty if you damage their expensive roof tiles.

Main Street Route: The main road is straight and wide but tends to be crowded with traffic, especially around the bridge. Once you're past that area, you have to run through the market, which is also crowded with milling people, especially on race day.

Poor Street Route: Certain elements of this neighborhood are dangerous. Since racers are sometimes fairly well off, predatory types may be keen to trip them up and take anything of value they might be carrying or using. The river is filthy here and there are no barges or bridges, so you're stuck swimming across. That gets you into Halfling Town, where if you're human-sized, squeezing through the tight streets can be an issue. If you're halfling-sized, of course, those streets can give you an edge over larger competitors.

Poor Roof Route: The roofs are a bit rickety but they haven't fallen down yet. Birds like to roost in the brickwork and roof spaces, and running across their territory can bring them out. You can cross the river on the old city wall, though it's crumbling in places. Then you're onto the roofs of Halfling Town and they have a lot of chimneys, which means a lot of smoke.

Opponents Information

Basic information about the different racers can be gathered by making any of the following rolls at DC 10. 'Basic information' amounts to name, race, gender, and some idea of how the character earns a living.

Bluff: Pretending to be an interested fan rather than another racer might get people to open up who otherwise wouldn't.

Diplomacy: Asking the right questions to the right people in the right way, all while being calm and approachable, can be an effective method for getting information.

Insight: Simply observing people while they talk about the race and the racers gives a perceptive person plenty of information to work on.

Intimidate: You can bully information about the other racers out of people, though it might not always be reliable.

Streetwise: Talking to the right people and hanging out in the right places should reveal some interesting gossip that might give you a tactical advantage.

Deeper information about the other racers can be garnered using the same skills at DC 15, rolling once for each. Gathering the information will take the rest of the evening and could be divvied up between the characters. This can be done at the same time as they are looking for more info on the routes.

Dorion Light-Step: Dorion is an elf, a woodsman from the nearby forests, young by their reckoning, and a good person. He knows how to climb and run but he's probably not ruthless and nasty enough to win the race.

Garth Cooper: Garth's a local watchman. He knows the city like the back of his hand. While he's sworn to uphold the law, he tends to get a bit carried away showing off for the ladies and he really, really wants to win. He won't be above a little trickery.

Two Teeth: Two-Teeth is some half-breed barbarian. Nobody quite knows where he comes from, but he literally ran into town on those tree-trunk legs and has shown himself to be a powerful brute. Despite his heritage, he doesn't seem to be a bad sort of fellow. He certainly doesn't talk much. Two-Teeth is expected to largely ignore other racers unless they cross him, and then they should watch out.

Gazunda: That dastardly gnome is a thief, a liar and a cheat. Don't take your eyes off him or turn your back on him. If he shakes your hand, check to make sure you still have your glove. He won't hesitate to stick a knife in your back or set fire to the roof you're running on if it will let him get ahead.

Tom Burgher: Tom's a street entertainer who rolled into town quite a few months ago. He's a mediocre singer but a decent acrobat, and a dab hand with that staff of his. Tom probably won't cause any trouble, but he's unpredictable, so don't be sure.

The Start

The crowds cheer as the contestants line up just inside the southern gate, sizing each other up. With a great deal of gravitas, the captain of the watch passes before each contestant, bows, and presents them with a small scroll bound up with red ribbon–the message to be delivered at the end of the race. With this accomplished, he paces to the side of the starting line and raises a bright red handkerchief and waves it furiously like a flag to signal the guards. In a moment there is a loud 'CLANG!' right behind the runners as the portcullis drops. The race has begun!

And the racers are off and running. Initiative should be rolled now and used to determine turn order throughout the entire race. Each of the NPC runners takes off along their chosen routes, leaving the players to choose their own paths.

So You're Out of the Race?

You're lagging behind all the other racers and there seems to be no way you can catch up. Don't give up! There are still a few things you can do, especially if you have a friend who's still in the race.

For someone who's hopelessly behind, there are quicker ways of getting around. This isn't easy or automatic; a player needs to come up with a good idea for how they'll not only catch up but get ahead, such as flying or grabbing a horse. For obvious reasons, it needs to be something that would normally get the racer disqualified (otherwise, he could just do this to catch up and get back in the race!). By the time a character gets into position for any of the following options, there's no chance to simply jump back into the race; he's been seen 'cheating' by too many observers. All of these strategies are also available to characters who didn't join the race but planned to act as 'racer support' all along.

- **Cut ahead and yell encouragement:** Once out ahead, a character can keep pace and yell encouragement to his fellows or jeers at their opponents, which grants either a +1 bonus for encouragement or a -1 penalty for discouragement.
- **Sabotage the other racers:** Once you get ahead, you can lay a few little surprises for the racers: traps, tripwires, oil slicks, and so on. This is unsporting, but it's not against the rules of the race. The actual effects of such hazards must be judged by the DM based on the type of hazard, where it's created, and how much time the character has to construct and camouflage it.
- **Foul Play:** While a little nondeadly sabotage and a few beatings are all par for the course in this race, more direct or forceful attempts to interfere with the racers are frowned upon. That doesn't mean that an enterprising and unscrupulous adventurer couldn't shoot one of the runners with a crossbow if they really wanted to. At the very least it should make the racer duck and slow down a bit. You don't want to get caught doing this, however.
- **Spread Rumors:** Spectators can easily spread rumors about the conduct and tactics of one of the other racers. An angry crowd on the verge of rioting is about the only thing that could overturn a winner and prevent them from claiming the prize. This would be a skill challenge set by the Dungeon Master in response to events that have happened during the race, which will determine how riled up the crowd already is.
- **Play the Crowd:** Hundreds of people are packed into all the best viewing spaces along the route, very intent on the race and dressed up to celebrate. That makes a tempting target for a pickpocket and gives plenty of opportunities for thieves to break into houses. Criminal activity of this type gains a +2 bonus while the race is in progress and everyone is distracted (and more likely to be wearing their wealth).

Rich Roof Route

This path requires climbing up onto the buildings above the magic and noble quarters of the city. These large, grand buildings are better made than most but they're also built further apart, requiring a little more athleticism to get across the open spaces.

Getting up onto the rooftops requires an Athletics skill check against DC 10 or an Acrobatics check against DC 15. Provided this succeeds, it does not count as the roll for this turn and the runner may proceed directly to the first skill challenge. If this check fails, the runner is stalled and his turn ends.

Magical Quarter: Hot Roof

As the race starts, you scramble onto the roofs of the magical quarter, clambering up through ornate weather vanes and baroque experiments as you start to sprint. The street below is billowing with strangely colored smoke and, as you dash along, you realize that the roof tiles beneath your feet are scaldingly hot.

Each failed roll at this skill challenge also causes the runner to take 1 hit point of damage as their feet are scalded.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Endurance, Perception

Acrobatics (DC 10): By springing from brick to brick and keeping off the tiles, jumping over the hotter parts and keeping your feet off the ground as much as possible, you can get across the hot roof without too much trouble. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Athletics (DC 15): The best thing to do is just to put your head down and charge across the roof fast enough that you don't get burned. The sooner you're across, the less harm you're going to take. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Endurance (DC 15): The heat is going to hurt long before it does you any real damage. You can grin and bear it and worry about getting your burns healed later on. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Perception (DC 20): The hot tiles have a heat haze over them and are a little blackened. With your expert eye, you can spot the hottest parts of the roof and weave around them. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Success: You reach the edge of the shop roof and leap over the space onto the next roof where the tiles are blessedly cool.

Failure: The roof is too hot and you can't bear it. Your feet are in agony. You must get away from the pain as soon as you can by dropping down to the Rich Street Route You retain your successes so far as progress in that challenge area.

The River: Rigging

The roofs of the magical quarter drop away abruptly as you reach the river. The river is wider and deeper here than on the other side of town. A few small sail boats are moored here as well as the river barges. You might be able to spring from one to the next in order to get across the river.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

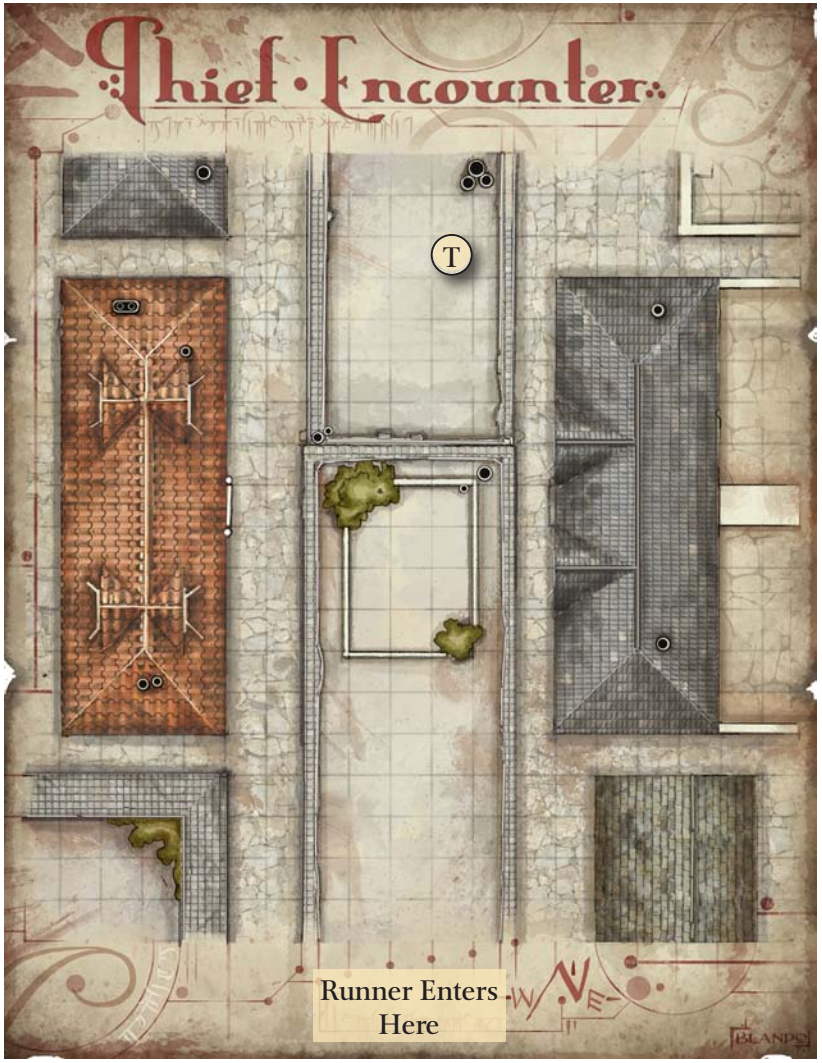
Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics

Acrobatics (DC 15): With your acrobatic skill, you can spring from mast to mast and beam to beam quickly and accurately to land on the roofs at the other side of the river. This skill can earn a maximum of 3 successes.

Athletics (DC 20): A headlong dash and a desperate jump or two might get you to the other side, with a bit of luck and a strong tailwind. This skill can earn a maximum of 3 successes.

Success: You leap from precarious perch to precarious perch and make it to the other side of the river in good time, taking a deep breath and scrambling up onto the roofs of the richer houses.

Failure: You lose your footing and plummet down into the stinking water of the river. You are swept down to the 'barges' skill challenge in the Wealthy Street Route. You can retain your successes from this challenge and finish crossing using the swimming challenge rules given there.



Wealthy Quarter: A Moral Dilemma

Clambering over the crenulated and garden-studded roofs of the rich and powerful, you suddenly espy a thief, using the commotion of the race to pilfer, clambering out of an upstairs window almost directly in your path. If you run on you'll have allowed a thief to get away, but if you interfere you might forfeit the race . . .

The thief is an opportunist who is most interested in getting away with his swag. He will fight viciously but only if cornered. If left alone, the thief will not interfere with the runner, being far more interested in absconding with his loot.

The thief's swag should be worth no more than around 50 gold pieces, if the player decides to keep it. If a character stops the thief, they might get half that much as a reward, plus the experience points for dealing with the thief.

Rather than fighting the thief, characters can elect to leave him alone and escape through the other side of the roof (refer to the Thief Encounter map). Each turn of combat or pursuit gives the other racers a chance to move forward with their own skill challenge.

Escaping from the roof allows the character to progress to the next area. Killing or otherwise besting the thief will lead to a reward at the end of the race as noted above and some additional experience points. Either way, the thief will not be on this roof for anyone following after the lead hero.

If the thief knocks out, kills, or immobilizes a character, he has no reason to stick around (unless you decide to have him sift through the unfortunate character's pockets). He escapes as quickly as possible.

Halfling Second-Storey Man		Level 2 Skirmisher
Small natural humanoid		XP 125
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +1	
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17		
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14		
Speed 6		
⊕ **Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+7 vs. AC; 1d4 + 2 damage, or 1d4 + 6 with combat advantage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).		
➳ **Thrown Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
Ranged 5/10; +7 vs. AC; 1d4 + 2 damage, or 1d4 + 6 with combat advantage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).		
Mobile Melee Attack (standard; at will)		
The second-storey man can shift up to 3 squares and make one melee basic attack at any point during that movement.		
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common and Elven	
Skills Acrobatics +11, Athletics +9, Thievery +11		
Str 13 (+2)	**Dex** 14 (+3)	**Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 10 (+1)
Equipment leather armor, six daggers, thieves' tools		

The Tower

Coming down from the wealthy area's roofs brings the runner to the tower, which is described on page 23 as the final obstacle.

Rich Street Route

Smoking Barrels

As the race starts, you dart into the side streets, heading into the clean and tree-lined paths of the richer side of town. You pass beneath the spires and gargoyle-festooned crenulations of the college of wizardry, shifting back and forth through the crowd before you're interrupted by a loud 'crump!' noise and a cloud of sparkling, multicolored smoke billows out of the nearby cellars of an alchemy shop. It floods the street with thick, noxious gas which obscures the shop fronts, crates, and the tangled mass of street detritus in a thick, billowing cloud.

The magic smoke that's bubbling and roiling out of the cellars is more than a little noxious. It makes a +5 vs. Fortitude attack against the racer. If the attack is successful, the racer takes 1d6 + 3 damage and a penalty of -2 to Endurance checks for the rest of the race. The effect fades after a 5-minute rest. Characters can avoid the smoke by changing route if they wish, but this will delay them.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Arcana, Athletics, Endurance

Acrobatics (DC 15): The smoke is dense and thick, staying close to the ground. Without climbing up onto the roofs, you can still avoid the smoke by taking to the higher ground, climbing on awnings or market stalls, and leaping from wagon to wagon. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Arcana (DC 20): With your special knowledge of magic, you can identify the particular qualities of this smoke and grab some ingredients from the alchemy stall in which to soak a cloth which you can then hold over your mouth to lessen the effects of the smoke. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Athletics (DC 10): Ducking your head down, you forge through the smoke, barging people out of the way and trying just to get through it as quickly as possible with speed and brute force. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Endurance (DC 15): If you can endure the stinging pain and the racking cough that the glowing smoke causes, you can take your time and pick your way carefully through the panicking, coughing crowd. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: You force your way free of the smoke and emerge, eyes streaming with tears, gasping for clean air, back onto the street as another loud 'crump!' sounds from the cellars behind you, showering the street with sparks as something else catches fire.

Failure: You get confused in the smoke and end up turned around on yourself, bumping people and emerging from the cloud back where you started. Either try again—including being attacked by the noxious smoke but retaining existing successes toward completion—or move to a different route.

The River: Barges

This side route doesn't have a bridge; you need to make your way across the water by some other means. The water is filthy and busy, with barges moving up and down between the rickety wooden docks carrying goods up- and downriver. A ragged cheer goes up from some of the bargers and from onlookers on the shore as they take bets over how you're going to get across the river.

The water is both disgustingly fetid and incredibly busy. Anyone failing a skill check while crossing is either bumped or run into by a boat or takes a mouthful of disgusting water. In either instance, they lose 1d4 hit points each time.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Bluff/Intimidate, Thievery

Acrobatics (DC 20): Waiting for the perfect moment, you charge forward to spring from deck to deck of the various barges and rowboats and get across the river without touching the water once. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Athletics (DC 10): Sometimes the simplest approaches are the best; you dive headlong into the stinking water and swim as fast as you can to reach the other side before swallowing too much scummy, lifeless water. This skill can earn a maximum of 3 successes.

Bluff/Intimidate (DC 20): The best way across the water is the same as the best way to get up and down the river. You can either persuade or intimidate someone into giving up their rowboat so you can row across in safety and comfort. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Thievery (DC 15): If you can't persuade someone to give up their rowboat and you can't terrify them into handing it over, you'll just have to steal one. There are plenty tied up on the bank and along the rickety wooden piers. All you need to do is grab one without being stopped. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Success: Characters who succeed in crossing the river emerge on the other side to continue along their route.

Failure: Characters who fail in the crossing are swept downriver to the next route across, where they keep trying to get the rest of the successes they need to cross. Once they get four successes in total they're across the river, at whatever point where they finally succeed.

Wealthy Quarter: Guard Dogs

While sprinting through the rich quarter, you're forced to take a diversion to avoid a blockage in the street. When you vault over a low wall into a great, green garden surrounding a magnificent home, a pack of spike-collared guard dogs comes snarling and barking out of the shadows beneath the trees, making a line straight for you. Streamers of saliva trail behind them as they pound the dirt toward you.

This square-off against the dogs is a tough encounter for a single character. It's important to note that the character doesn't need to defeat the dogs in battle; he only needs to get past them.

The animals are something between wild wolves and domesticated dogs. They're fiercely loyal to their trainers but can be viciously dangerous to intruders, especially since they haven't eaten a thing all day.

Besides fighting their way through the dogs, characters can try to dodge past the dogs and escape over the far wall (Athletics DC 15) or through the locked gate (Thievery DC 15). Each turn of fighting or fleeing gives the other racers a chance to move forward with their own skill challenges.

Escaping from the garden allows the character to progress to the next area. Killing the guard dogs could lead to a confrontation with the owner after the race, but it also clears the garden of the dogs for anyone trailing behind.

If the dogs bring a character down to 0 hit points, they stand over the body waiting for their owner to come and deal with the trespasser. Other racers or friends can intervene to help someone in this situation, after dealing with the dogs.

5 Fierce Dogs (D)		Level 1 Minion
Medium natural beast		XP 25 each
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +6, low-light vision	
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion		
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 11		
Speed 8		
⊕ **Bite** (Standard; at-will)		
+6 vs. AC; 4 damage, or 6 against a prone target. If the fierce dog has combat advantage against the target, the target also falls prone.		
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** -	
Str 13 (+1)	**Dex** 14 (+2)	**Wis** 13 (+1)
Con 14 (+2)	**Int** 2 (-4)	**Cha** 10 (+0)

The Tower

Coming in from the wealthy area's streets brings the runner to the tower, which is the final obstacle (pg. 23).

Main Street Route

The Main Road: Crowds

As the race begins you charge past – and through – the cheering crowds and up the cobbles of the main road, bruising your feet on the hard, rounded stones, as you sprint toward your first landmark, the bridge. The crowds of cheering spectators are packed thicker and thicker, cheek by jowl with disgruntled tradesmen and townsfolk simply trying to go about their daily business. It's going to be hard to get through this crowd.

Each failed roll in trying to shove through the crowd results in the loss of a single hit point from being buffeted and knocked around by annoyed townsfolk.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Bluff, Diplomacy, Intimidate

Acrobatics (DC 10): With your agility you can worm through the crowd and get above it, moving from wagon to wagon and beam to beam, even using people's shoulders as a springboard to run over and above the crowd to get to the bridge. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Athletics (DC 15): You hunker down and put your shoulder into it, barging through the crowd and shoving people out of the way in order to get past the tangle. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Bluff (DC 15): Shouting something like 'fire!', 'bandits!' or 'runaway bull!' is a good way of motivating the crowd to scramble out of your way. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Diplomacy (DC 20): 'Excuse me. Pardon me. I'm terribly sorry.' These aren't phrases typically associated with adventurers in a hurry but from sheer shock value they might get enough people to budge just far enough for you to get through. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Intimidate (DC 15): If you holler 'MOVE!' loudly enough and spray people with enough saliva while flexing your muscles, there's a good chance they'll scramble away in fright. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: You emerge from the other side of the crowd somehow, to find yourself at the bridge.

Failure: Failure to negotiate the crowd results in getting crushed by the heaving mob. The character takes 1d6 + 3 points of damage and is ejected from the crowd. The runner can elect to cross to a different route or try to push through again, retaining their existing successes for the next try.

The Main Road: The Bridge

Leaving the crowd behind, you arrive at the one, main bridge that serves the whole town for getting from one side to the other. There's a steady flow of people back and forth across this broad, stone path . . . or there would be if two big carts hadn't tried to cross at the same time and gotten stuck, their respective owners arguing and shaking their fists at each other. This is, apparently, almost a daily occurrence.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Diplomacy, Intimidate, Nature

Acrobatics (DC 15): By jumping up onto the side of the bridge, you can walk along the top of the wall and avoid the blockage and the crowds building up on the bridge deck. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Diplomacy (DC 10): If you can smooth things over between the owners of two carts that are tangled together, they'll be able to move them apart enough so you can squeeze between them instead of going around. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Intimidate (DC 15): A harsh word with the country bumpkins who are arguing over who should get out of whose way scares both of them into getting out of the way. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Nature (DC 20): While the cart owners are arguing, you could take charge of the situation and lead one of the horses out of the way yourself. Then everyone could get across the bridge without needing to thread through the tangle of cartwheels and horse flesh. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Success: If you succeed, you manage to negotiate the snarl on the bridge and can carry on into the marketplace that stands near the foot of the north tower.

Failure: You get stuck in the crowd that is milling around the carts and can't move in any direction. You miss a turn, but then you can continue rolling for this skill challenge, accumulating new successes on top of your existing successes.

The Main Road: The Market

The marketplace is a tangle of tents, stalls and crowds made up of many different peoples from the surrounding area. It's full of the smells and sounds of any busy town and the ways between the stalls are close-packed with shuffling people carrying their purchases. The only real gaps are behind the stalls, but you can't just go cutting through there, can you?

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Bluff, Intimidate, Streetwise

Acrobatics (DC 20): The tents and rickety stalls won't support your weight, but you should be able to dash and tumble through them, thereby avoiding the worst of the crowds. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Athletics (DC 15): You can set your shoulders and barge through the crowd, though it won't make you any friends and may shove some people into the stalls and knock over a few merchants' wagons. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Bluff (DC 15): "Everything is half price at the butcher's shop!" is a fine thing to shout if you want to make an enemy of a man with a cleaver. It's also a good thing to shout if you want to get a big crowd of townsfolk out of your way in a hurry. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Intimidate (DC15): Many townsfolk mistrust adventurers at the best of times and fear them at the worst. All sorts of stories are told about wandering bands of vicious grave robbers. You can play off that and act up to your fearsome reputation in order to send people leaping over the stalls and out of your way. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Streetwise (DC 10): If there's one thing you know, it's how to move through a crowd. You slip and slide through the press of bodies with no regard for propriety, property, or personal space. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: You manage to get through the market and the crowd of onlookers waiting for the end of the race in order to reach the foot of the north tower, the last obstacle between you and the prize.

Failure: Failure in the market results in being shoved prone by a band of annoyed shoppers and shopkeepers, which delays you for a turn. After that, you may try again to get through the market, retaining your existing successes.

The Tower

The market runs almost all the way up to the base of the north tower, where a crowd has gathered to await the runners who will then need to climb to the top to claim the prize.

Poor Street Route

Poor Quarter: Thuggery

As you leap off the starting line and dart, immediately, into the dark and winding alleys of the poor quarter you're already aware of eyes on you from the windows and cul-de-sacs. Sure enough, you round a corner to be confronted by a gang of four surly thugs who seem intent on either robbing you, or breaking your legs for the hell of it. You're not sure which.

Level: 2 (XP 124)

Thugs: These guys get a kick out of interfering with the racers. Any money they make from beating up a contestant is secondary to the pleasure of simply ruining someone's day. If a character chooses to fight, use the Thugs Encounter map as the tactical map for this encounter.

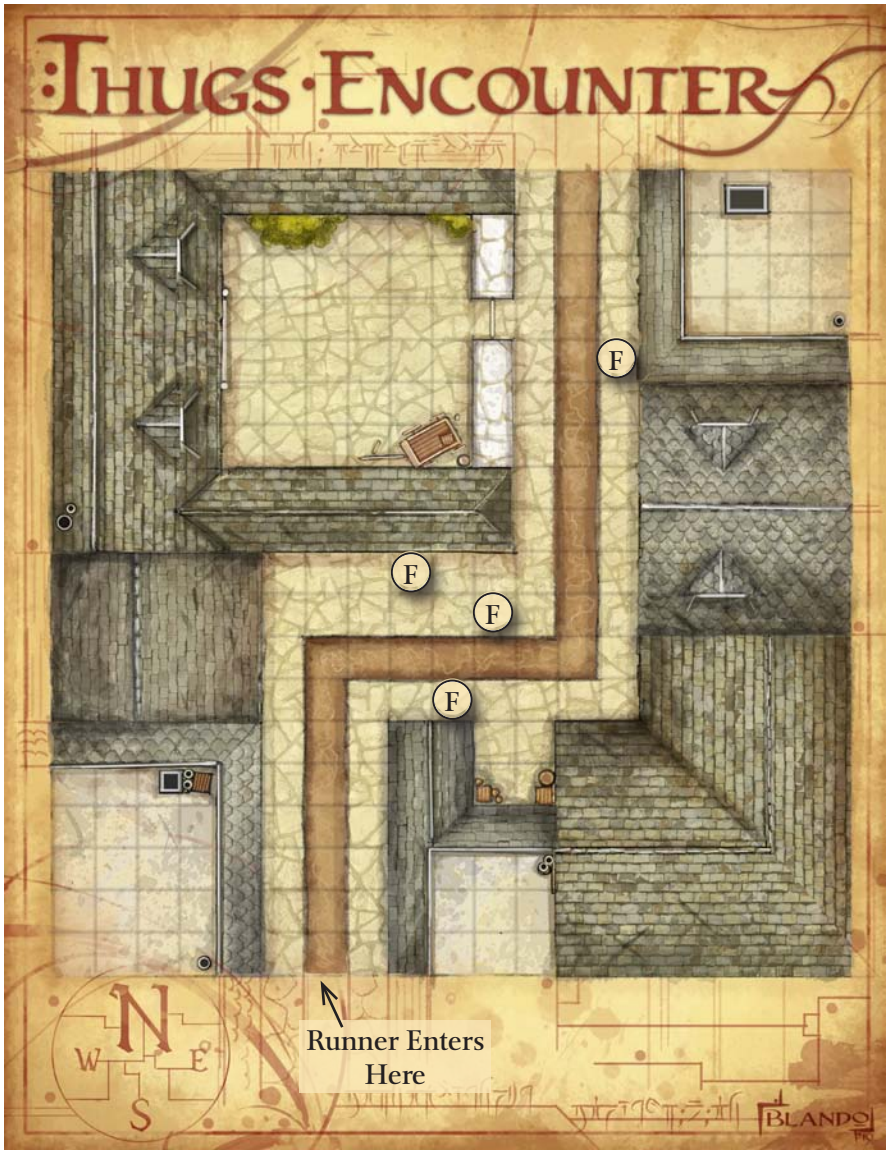
Other Approaches: There may be other ways to get past the thugs. They could be bribed; this requires at least 20 gold pieces and a Streetwise check (DC 15), taking one turn per attempt. They could be bamboozled into letting someone past; this is a complexity 1 skill challenge based on Bluff, Intimidate, Streetwise, and Thievery at DC 15, making one skill check per turn. Failing in either case means that they'd rather fight than talk. Success means they let the character past.

If the encounter goes to combat, the character may be able to evade the thugs and race off the far end of the map. That qualifies as a safe escape, too.

Success: You get past the thugs one way or another and reach the bank of the filthy river that cuts the town in half.

Failure: Failure here comes only when the thugs have beaten a character to the ground. They won't kill someone outright, but they will beat a character into unconsciousness and then take absolutely everything from him, including the clothes off his back.

4 Footpads (F)	Level 2 Minion
Medium natural humanoid	XP 31 each
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +0
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion	
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Club** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+7 vs. AC; 5 damage, and the footpad shifts 1 square.	
Peer Pressure	
The footpad gains a +2 bonus to damage while at least two other footpads are within 5 squares of it.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common and Dwarven
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 10 (+1) **Wis** 10 (+1)	
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 9 (+0) **Cha** 11 (+1)	
Equipment club	



The River: Dirty Water

There are no bridges, boats, or barges here to cross the river. If you're going to get across, then you really only have one option; to take a plunge into the filthy water and swim across to the other side as fast as you can.

The water is disgustingly fetid. Anyone failing a single check while crossing it takes a mouthful of disgusting water, losing 1d4 hit points each time .

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Athletics, Endurance, Nature

Athletics (DC 10): After diving into the water, you hold your breath and concentrate on making powerful strokes with your arms and legs to carry you to the other side. This skill can earn a maximum of 3 successes.

Endurance (DC 15): Even if you're not that good a swimmer, the river doesn't move that fast. It's more about enduring the discomfort until you get to the other side. You can bear it . . . . This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Nature (DC 20): If you judge the current right, it will carry you partway to the other side of the river, saving you a lot of effort. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Success: You reach the other side of the river and haul your dripping body out onto the bank, wringing out the worst of the water and trying to work up the energy to run through the Halfling Quarter.

Failure: You get turned around in the murky water, choking and gurgling on the filth as you try to get your bearings. You miss a turn and then may continue the crossing, retaining your existing successes.

Halfling Quarter: Rat Run

The houses and shops suddenly shrink down, the alleys cramping in as you enter the Halfling Quarter, an area of the town that the halflings and other 'little folk' have claimed for themselves. It's terribly cramped and hard to move if you're of a human size and you feel like a blundering elephant. Other 'little people' are going to have an easier time of it here, even if the alleyways are a confusing rat run and maze, the whole quarter having been thrown together hap-hazard.

Any runner who is Medium or larger is going to have trouble making their way through this area; the DCs of their rolls on the skill challenge are increased by 2.

Level: level 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Athletics, Dungeoneering, Perception, Streetwise

Athletics (DC 20): Provided you run fast enough and don't care too much about who you trample or what you knock over, you should be able to plough through this district like a rampaging giant and get out the other side quickly enough. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Dungeoneering (DC 15): Being hemmed in like this isn't so different from being in a dungeon. Your dungeon instincts might help see you through to the other side. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Perception (DC 15): With a keen eye for the foot traffic and the north tower clearly visible from where you are, you work out which of the many rat-runs actually leads out of the quarter and up to the tower. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Streetwise (DC 10): Knowing the way of the streets is your best ticket through this warren of alleys and narrow avenues. This skill can earn a maximum of 3 successes.

Success: You emerge from the narrow streets, trailing overturned barrows and bruised halflings in your wake, and emerge near the foot of the north tower for the final hurdle.

Failure: You get turned around and lost in the streets. You're caught in the tiny, narrow, twisting alleyways until you barely know which way is which. You lose a turn but can then continue, retaining your existing successes.

The Tower

Leaving the Halfling Quarter brings the runner out, close to the northern tower and ready to climb it in order to claim their win.

Poor Roof Route

Poor Quarter: Pigeons

The portcullis slams down and the ringing of iron against stone sets you going. You leap onto barrels and scramble up onto the roofs of the buildings on the poorer side of town. (Ascending to the roof requires an Athletics check against DC 10). As you hit the roof and start running, great clouds of panicked pigeons fly up in droves. Startled by your intrusion, they fill the air with beating wings and fluttering feathers until you can barely see where you're going.

Each failed attempt costs the runner a single hit point of damage from getting pecked and battered and from bumping into chimney stacks in the confusion.

Level: level 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Endurance, Nature, Perception

Endurance (DC 20): You can ward off the blasted birds with your arms and wade through the storm of wings, excrement, and feathers, if you can ignore the mess and the pain. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Nature (DC 15): You know a thing or two about birds. If you just slow down a little and drop into a crouch, you won't spook them half so much. Then you should be able to get through just fine. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Perception (DC 10): Between your memory of what the roofs look like and what you can still make out by squinting, you can pick your way through the confusion. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: You emerge from the cloud of pigeons and leap to the next roof, which carries you to the remnants of the old city wall that crosses the river.

Failure: You get turned around, blinded by a particularly persistent pigeon doing its very best to climb into your mouth. As you pull it away, you misstep and take a 10-foot fall off the edge of the roof. Start again next turn, keeping the successes from this turn.

The River: The Old City Wall

The river at this side of town is spanned by the old city wall from when the town was much smaller. Its crumbling arches cross over the filthy water and afford a skillful runner a quick way across the river to the safety of the low roofs of the Halfling Quarter.

Each failure in this challenge causes part of the ancient wall to crumble away, making the path more unpredictable and dangerous. This increases the DCs of all subsequent skill checks by +1, for this runner only.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Dungeoneering

Acrobatics (DC 15): If you can keep your balance, you can sprint across the top of the wall and keep ahead of the crumbling masonry. This will get you across very quickly. Ths skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Athletics (DC 10): You can't just walk or run across the entire length of the wall; portions are just too precarious and unstable. If you treat it more like climbing, you can pick your way over the stones–slowly–and safely reach the other side. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Dungeoneering (DC 20): Knowledge of walls, brickwork, and ruins is valuable for survival in a dungeon, and the same things apply here. With this knowledge, you can pick out which parts of the wall will support your weight and which will not. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: You leap down from the far side of the wall onto the jumbled roofs of the Halfling Quarter, then dash on toward your final goal with all haste.

Failure: The wall partially collapses under you, spilling you down into the water in a shower of bricks and stones. You lose a turn and then shift to The River: Dirty Water on the Poor Street Route (pg. 21). Retain the successes that you've already accrued, but continue with that swimming skill challenge.

Halfling Quarter: Chimblies

The Halfling Quarter is a jumble of low, thrown-together buildings. Because they're so much smaller than 'normal' human houses, the chimneys are much closer together and all of them seem to be spewing smoke and cinders all at once, along with the many and varied smells of cooking food. It's both distracting and confusing, not to mention hot. You need to wind your way through the chimneys and the smoke to find the other side.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Endurance, Perception

Acrobatics (DC 15): Weaving between the chimney stacks without disaster should be no problem at all for someone with your nimbleness. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Endurance (DC 10): It's just smoke; a little thicker than a campfire or a tavern but still only smoke. You can ignore your streaming eyes and burning lungs long enough to get to the other side. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Perception (DC 20): From the way the smoke rises and churns, you can figure out where the chimney stacks are and avoid them. That should help to get you through the smoke to the other side. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: You burst out of the smoke, coughing and spluttering, eyes streaming, but within dashing distance of the finish line at the north tower.

Failure: With your eyes streaming tears, lungs burning, cinders searing your skin, and blundering against chimney pots, you find yourself utterly disoriented in the smoke. Take a single hit point of damage and a penalty of –2 to Perception for the remainder of the race. By redoubling your efforts, you can continue through the smoke next turn, retaining your existing successes.

The Tower

It's not that far down to the street from the roofs of the Halfling Quarter, and then it's a short sprint across the cobbles to the base of the northern tower, where the last challenge of the race awaits.

THE TOWER

To win the race, you need to clamber to the top of the northern watchtower and hand your letter to the town elder. The tower is old and craggy and many of the bricks look loose. Pigeons roost amongst the nooks and crannies and the stone is stained white with their droppings in many places, incongruous clumps of wild grasses and flowers sprouting from unlikely places amongst the brickwork.

Level: 2 (XP 250)
Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures)
Primary Skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, Dungeoneering, Endurance, History, Nature, Thievery

Acrobatics (DC 15): Swinging from wooden support beams to outward-jutting bricks will get you up the wall quicker than simply climbing. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Athletics (DC 10): It's a straightforward climb and an easy wall at that. There's no need to do anything fancy, just scramble up it. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Dungeoneering (DC 15): Long experience with tunnels and chambers gives you an intimate knowledge of brickwork, with its weak points and the best ways to ascend different surfaces. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Endurance (DC 15): More haste, less speed. Dogged determination counts for at least as much as skill. If you can endure the pain of supporting your own weight, you can take your time climbing the wall. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

History (DC 20): You know the wall was damaged by an orcish attack about a decade ago and the north-facing wall had to be rebuilt. It might be a little harder to climb but it's not going to fall apart on you, either. This skill can earn a maximum of 1 success.

Nature (DC 20): The tower is overgrown with several kinds of creepers and ivy. With your knowledge of plants, you know which ones should hold your weight and, crucially, which ones don't have thorns or contact poisons. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Thievery (DC 15): If this were a bank vault, it would be the easiest heist ever. The mortar is old and crumbly, making it child's play to climb by jamming daggers in the chinks or just scraping away hunks of loose mortar to create your own handholds. This skill can earn a maximum of 2 successes.

Success: The character scrambles over the edge of the parapet and scrambles to the bell, ringing it out and winning the race–if they're the first person to get here. Then they can clamber wearily down the stairs and claim their magnificent prize!

Failure: One or two failures indicate slippage, losing one's grip but then managing to grasp hold of the tower again without falling. If a character gets three failures before six successes, they fall from the tower. The distance is 10 feet for each success they've accrued, with the normal 1d10 damage for every 10 feet fallen. Characters who survive can start climbing again, but they do so from the bottom; successes are not kept!

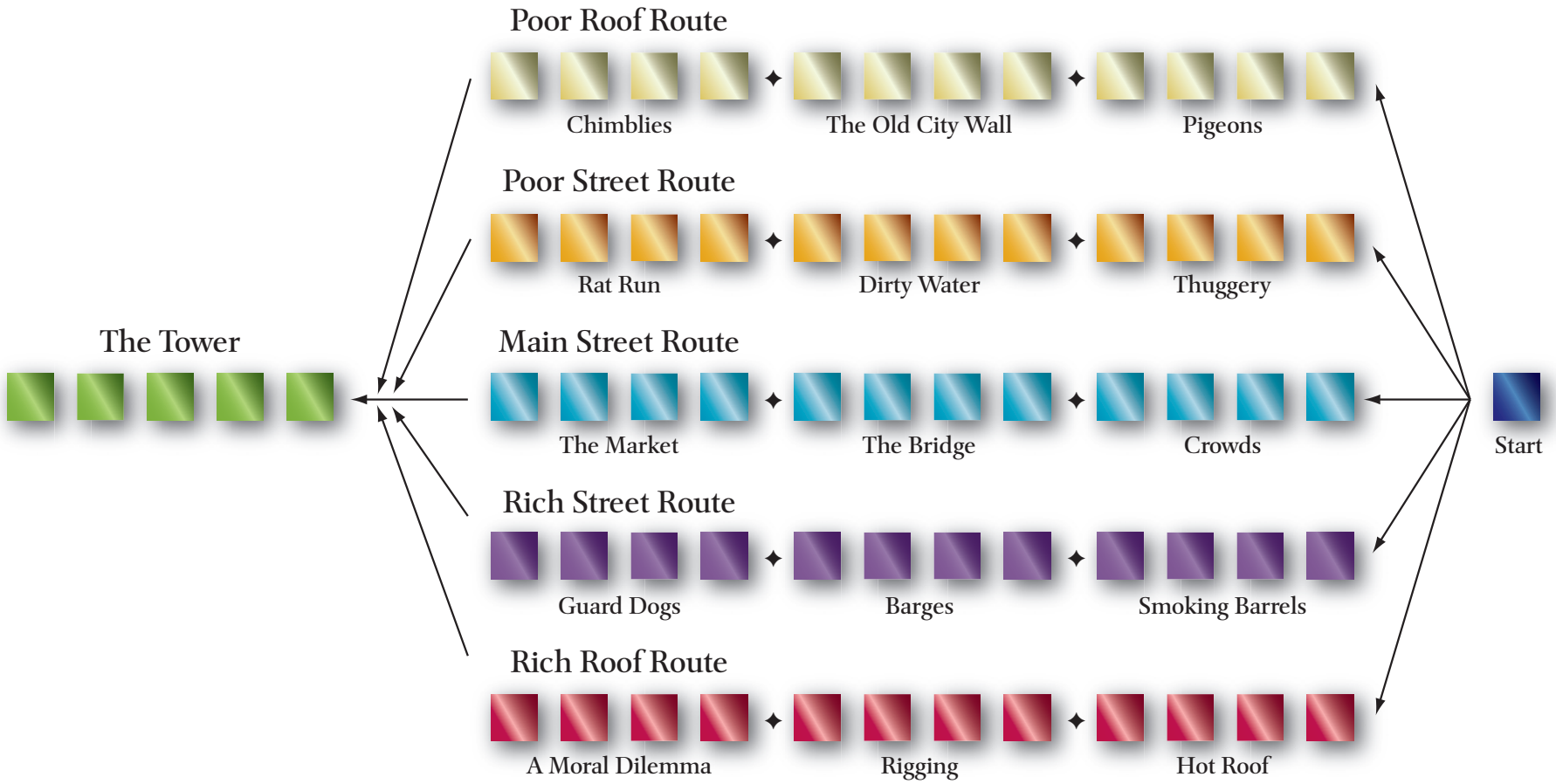
VICTORY!

You press the crumpled and illegible note into the town elder's hand and he raises your arm triumphantly, proclaiming you to be the winner and ringing the alarum bell that hangs in the tower. As it peels, a great cheer goes up from the crowd and the town crier solemnly steps forward to present your prize, a fine pair of boots that twinkle with the glow of magic and a small but weighty coffer of gold. Right now, you're probably too tired to lift it, but it's a fine prize for a morning's work.

The winning racer receives a lacquered coffer filled to the brim with 400 gold pieces, plus a pair of *surefoot boots* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 130). They can eat and drink for free during the rest of the day and night's festivities, thanks to all the delighted locals who are happy to buy them drinks and meals. They will be treated as a minor local celebrity, at least until next year's race.

About the Author

Hailing from The Shires of "Merrie Olde England," James "Grim" Desborough escapes from his idyllic, countrified surroundings by indulging his imagination in violence, adventure, and cut-price succubi. Grim freelances across the roleplaying industry and has contributed material to *City of Stormreach* and *Monster Manual V* (both for 3rd Edition).


Poor Roof Route
Chimblies
The Old City Wall
Pigeons
Poor Street Route
Rat Run
Dirty Water
Thuggery
The Tower
Main Street Route
The Market
The Bridge
Crowds
Start
Rich Street Route
Guard Dogs
Barges
Smoking Barrels
Rich Roof Route
A Moral Dilemma
Rigging
Hot Roof

Dead by Dawn

An adventure for 2nd-level characters

By Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel ✦ Illustration by Craig Spearing

"Dead by Dawn" is a short adventure for five 2nd-level characters. It takes place in a small forest near the King's Wall, in a long-abandoned temple dedicated to the worship of the demon prince Orcus. The temple has been given a new and dire purpose by a Chaos Shard from the great meteor. This shard radiates dark energy capable of reanimating the dead, and its power has been strengthened by the lingering evil of the demon prince's temple. Each night, the shard fills the surrounding forest with the siren call of dark power, causing the many corpses in the Chaos Scar to stir. So far, only a few of the restless dead have risen from their graves, but now a group of brave adventurers have discovered the abandoned temple, just as the shard's call grows to a new peak, and the dead across this corner of the scar are about to walk the world once more.

Background

Long ago, a misguided cleric of Erathis named Tyrik Gerithson built a small temple to his deity in the wilds of the Chaos Scar. Foolishly, Tyrik believed he could bring civilization and order to the savage land beyond the King's Wall. Unfortunately, Erathis does not suffer fools lightly, and the goddess did not intervene when a band of cultists devoted to the demon

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lord Orcus swooped down and slaughtered Tyrik Gerithson and his followers.

After annihilating the followers of Erathis, the cult of Orcus claimed the temple and rededicated it to the worship of the demon prince of undeath. The cult was led by a grizzled priest named Garvus Harbane who maintained his position through the power of a meteor shard he had discovered. The shard radiated strong necrotic energy, and Garvus called his prized possession the "necroshard."

After leading the cult for many years, Garvus sought to prolong his life through a dangerous necromantic ritual a few years ago. However, he foolishly used the necroshard as the ritual's focus and unleashed a wave of raw energy that killed him and every living creature in the temple. Although a catastrophic and lethal failure for Garvus, his ritual increased the potential power of the necroshard tenfold. Each night since, the shard has slowly been growing in power. The necroshard's power is at its strongest at night, when it saturates the surrounding area with the power of death. This necromantic energy has been slowly building, feeding on the many deaths in the Scar over the years. Tonight, the corpses of the Scar will rise as an army of zombies.

Getting the Characters Involved

"Dead by Dawn" takes place in the Chaos Scar. You can use one of the hooks below to get the characters into the valley and the temple of Orcus.

Hook 1: Farian's Fee

Farian Blackhand, a mercenary and scoundrel, asks the characters to enter the Chaos Scar and locate a group of mercenary adventurers called Doran's Daggers. Farian fears that Doran and his group have met a bad end, and since Farian has not been paid for his last job with the Daggers, he asks the characters to find Doran Underhelm, dead or alive, and collect the 100 gp owed to him. Farian tells the characters that Doran often carries large sums of coin and gems on his person, and since the mercenary leader is likely dead, the characters can keep whatever they find on his corpse, less what is owed to Farian. However, if Dorian is alive and the characters can collect Farian's fee, he agrees to split it with them. Doran can be identified by a tattoo of crossed axes on his left forearm.

Farian believes Doran's Daggers set out to explore an abandoned temple they discovered on a previous excursion into the Chaos Scar. If the characters agree to help him, Farian can tell them exactly where it is.

Quest XP: 250 XP for finding Doran dead or alive and returning with Farian's fee.

Hook 2: Pit Stop

Use this hook after the characters finish an adventure within the Chaos Scar. While traveling through a small forest on their way out of the Chaos Scar, the characters stumble upon the temple of Orcus late in the day. Should they decide to explore the temple, they quickly lose track of time, and before they know it, the sun is setting and ominous moaning and shuffling noises fill the forest beyond the temple walls...

Treasure Preparation

The following treasure parcels are available in *Dead by Dawn*. Since the encounter area remains the same throughout the adventure, two of the four treasure parcels can be found on the bodies of attacking zombies.

Parcel 1: Temple Interior	Level 3 magic item
Parcel 2: The Rectory	100 gp, two 100-gp gems
Parcel 3: Zombie Siege: First Wave	Two *potions of healing*, one 100-gp gem, 60 gp
Parcel 4: Zombie Siege: Second Wave	Level 4 magic item

Player Introduction

Read or paraphrase the following when the characters reach the temple of Orcus:

The trees of the forest suddenly give way to a large, bare clearing dominated by a weed-choked temple. Its peaked roof, festooned with demonic gargoyles, is largely intact, although its windowless walls are cracked and crumbling. The main entrance to the temple, two mammoth, ironbound doors, yawn open, exposing nothing but darkness beyond. Although obviously abandoned and in disrepair, the structure exudes a quiet malevolence made all the more haunting by the waning light of the setting sun.

Area 1: Temple Interior

When the characters enter the temple, it is late in the day and the sun is setting. Allow the characters to explore the temple interior and the rectory beneath it during the last few minutes of daylight.

When the characters enter the temple interior, read:

You step from the fading sunshine into the surprisingly cold darkness of the temple interior, gloomy and shrouded in shadow. The temple's floor is smooth, polished stone. The ceiling has collapsed in some areas and littered the ground with fallen debris, and in one section, the floor has collapsed, leaving an open pit. The interior walls feature fading murals depicting scenes of butchery, cannibalism, and other profane acts. The temple is divided into two sections by a row of tall, ornate bookshelves filled with crumbling scrolls and tomes. In addition, you notice a number of egresses beyond the main door, and two sets of smaller doors along the eastern and western walls.

The murals depict scenes of the Abyss. In addition to the demons in the murals, various types of undead are prominently depicted. Characters studying the mural closely see hints of an older, even more faded mural beneath the existing one. This older mural depicts scenes of vibrant cities; robed, stern-faced clerics preaching to a rapt audience of half-naked savages; diplomatic negotiations presided over by more robed clerics; and in the center of it all, a tall, statuesque woman in blue and silver. Characters who make a DC 10 Religion check correctly identify these images as iconography of the church of Erathis, goddess of civilization.

The older mural is more than a simple depiction of events and images important to the faithful of Erathis. The mural contains clues to the location of an old treasure cache containing items that could prove immensely helpful to the characters later in the adventure. Finding this cache requires two successful DC 15 Perception or Religion checks by a character or characters who seek a deeper meaning in the faded mural devoted to Erathis. If the characters are successful, they discover the location of the hidden cache behind the statue of Orcus at the northern end of the temple (see Features of the Area).

When the characters reach the northern end of the temple interior, read the following:

This end of the temple is similar to the other, save it is dominated by a massive statue of a horrid demon. The floor around the statue is stained with the rust-colored patina of old blood. The statue is flanked by a pair of huge braziers, each standing five feet high.

It should be obvious to the characters the statue is a representation of Orcus, Demon Lord of Undeath. A DC 15 Perception check reveals that the statue is a more recent addition to the temple. The crumbling base of another statue is barely visible beneath the current one.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The temple interior is unlit, although sunlight from the doorway filters through and fills the main chamber with dim light.

Ceiling: The ceiling in this area is 30 feet high.

Book Shelves: Each bookshelf is 10 feet high, constructed of thick hardwood, and holds scrolls and books on the subjects of demonology, undeath, and other unsavory subjects. A character can climb on top of a bookshelf with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Braziers: If lit, the two large braziers provide bright illumination out to 8 squares. The two smaller ones provide bright illumination out to 4 squares.

Debris: Squares with debris are considered difficult terrain.

Doors: Including the main doors, there are two sets of doors along the east and west wall, for a total of five doors in all. All the doors are jammed except the main doors, swelled and rusted with age. Opening one of these doors requires a DC 15 Strength check.

Pit: The pit is 10 feet deep. Climbing into and out of the pit requires a DC 10 Athletics check.

Smaller Statues: The two smaller statues along the east and west walls depict a male and female demon, winged and horrible. Creatures adjacent to a statue have cover. A character making a DC 10 Perception check notices that the statues have been repurposed, and were once depictions of the goddess Erathis and what was likely a cleric or paladin in her service.

Sarcophagi: A sarcophagus is difficult terrain that provides cover. Both sarcophagi are empty, having long ago been plundered.

Trapdoor: The trapdoor opens easily and leads to the temple rectory.

Treasure: Behind the great statue of Orcus, hidden in a hollow beneath a loose stone in the floor, lies a cache of holy items secreted by the faithful of Erathis long ago. If the characters succeeded at the Perception or Religion checks from examining the mural of Erathis, they learn the exact location of the cache. If they failed the skill checks, they might still find the cache of items after The Siege Begins encounter (page 31). The cache contains four vials of holy water (level 1) and two *potions of healing*.

Area 2: Rectory

Encounter Level 1 (XP 550)

Garvus (G)
3 zombie adventurers (Z)

Setup

The trapdoor in the northern end of the temple interior leads to a small rectory that once served as the personal quarters of the temple's high priests. It was here Garvus Harbane performed the ritual that claimed his life and the lives of his followers so many years ago. His corpse, withered and all but mummified, is still here, the necroshard hanging from its shriveled neck.

Although the corpses in the forest will animate tonight for the first time, the corpse of Garvus Harbane, due to its close proximity to the necroshard, has been animating each night for the past few weeks as a deathlock wight. Garvus, however, is not alone in the rectory. Doran Underhelm and his mercenary group Doran's Daggers decided to spend the night in the temple rectory after a fruitless exploration of the temple. When night fell, the necroshard's power was unleashed and Garvus' animated corpse slew them all.

When the characters enter the temple rectory, read:

The trapdoor opens easily with a gentle tug, unleashing a blast of violent purple light followed by the charnel stench of death. A short spiral staircase leads down 10 feet into a small rectory. The room below contains two sets of tables and chairs, a moth-eaten bearskin rug, two unlit braziers similar to those in the temple above, and two small beds with footlockers in an alcove. A small altar sits against the northern wall, and a pair of double doors stands in the center of the west wall.

Three rotting corpses lay in a heap near the two beds in the southern end of the room. Each is dressed in leather armor, now tattered and crusted with dried gore, and they all appear to have been half-devoured. A fourth corpse sits before the altar, legs curled beneath it, head bowed as if in prayer. This corpse is little more than a mummified husk, and its moth-eaten clerical robes bear the dire skull symbol of Orcus. Around its neck hangs a large, black gem on a crude leather thong. The gem glows brightly with a dire purple light that fills you with queasy dread.

As the characters begin to examine the room, the sun sets and the power of the necroshard is unleashed. The first clue that the characters are in real trouble is the animation of the corpses of Garvus and Doran's Daggers.

When the corpses animate, read:

The rectory is suddenly filled with a low, guttural moaning. To your horror, the four corpses, no longer simply inert flesh, climb unsteadily to their feet. The gem around the neck of mummified cleric pulses brightly as the four undead horrors lurch to the attack.

Tactics

The zombie adventurers attack the nearest character with *zombie grab*. At first, Garvus stays clear of melee and attacks the characters with *grave bolt* or *horrific visage* when it can avoid catching the zombie adventurers in the blast. When two of the zombie adventurers have fallen, Garvus uses *reanimate* and then enters melee. The undead in the rectory fight to their destruction.

3 Zombie Adventurers (Z)	Level 2 Brute
Medium natural animate	XP 125
Initiative -1	**Senses** Perception +0; darkvision
HP 40; **Bloodied** 20	
AC 13; **Fortitude** 13; **Reflex** 9; **Will** 10	
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 2d6 + 2 damage	
Zombie Grab (standard; at-will)	
+4 vs. Reflex; the target is grabbed (until escape). Checks made to escape the zombie's grab are made with a -5 penalty.	
Zombie Weakness	
Any critical hit to the zombie reduces it to 0 hit points instantly.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 6 (-1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)

The characters should recognize the black gem around Garvus' neck as a meteor fragment. They can learn more about its function and purpose with a DC 15 Arcana or Religion check. For each successful skill check the characters make, give them one of the following pieces of information.

- This shard radiates staggering amounts of necromantic energy, easily enough to animate the dead within the rectory.
- The shard's power is likely strengthened by the lingering energy in the temple of Orcus.
- The shard's power, like many evil items and creatures, is stronger at night.
- Undead may be drawn to the energy produced by the shard.

Now that the characters have the necroshard and likely understand its dire potential, what they do with it based on this knowledge could have serious consequences during the zombie siege. Below is a list of possible actions the characters might take and the consequences of those actions.

Garvus Harbane (G) (Deathlock Wight)	Level 4 Controller
Medium natural humanoid	XP 175
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +1; darkvision
HP 54; **Bloodied** 27	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 16; **Will** 17	
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+9 vs. AC; 1d6 necrotic damage, and the target cannot spend healing surges until the end of its next turn.	
Grave Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Ranged 20; +6 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).	
Reanimate (minor; encounter) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**	
Ranged 10; affects a destroyed undead creature of a level no higher than the deathlock wight's level + 2; the target stands as a free action with a number of hit points equal to one-half its bloodied value. This power cannot affect minions.	
Horrific Visage (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Fear**	
Close blast 5; +7 vs. Will; 1d6 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Arcana +10, Religion +10	
Str 10 (+2)	**Dex** 14 (+4) **Wis** 9 (+1)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 16 (+5) **Cha** 18 (+6)

- **Bring it Along:** If the characters take the necroshard from the rectory, the character carrying the necroshard on his or her person becomes the center of attention during the ensuing zombie siege. Whenever the character carrying the necroshard fails a primary skill check in the Zombie-Proofing the Temple and Shoring Up the Defenses skill challenges, add an additional zombie rotter to the number of zombies breaching the defenses.
- **Destroy It:** If the characters decide to destroy the necroshard, they can do so, as detailed in the Destroying the Necroshard section at the end of the adventure. However, if the necroshard is destroyed at night, at the height of its power, it unleashes one final, mammoth burst of necromantic energy. This massive infusion of power keeps the zombies animated until sunrise and sends the undead horde into a berserk frenzy. Whenever the characters fail a primary skill check during the Zombie-Proofing the Temple and Shoring Up the Defenses skill challenges add an additional zombie rotter to the number of zombies breaching the defenses.
- **Leave it Alone:** If the characters simply leave the necroshard in the rectory, events proceed as normal in the adventure. In this scenario, there are no significant changes to the adventure as written.
- **Let Them Have It:** At some point, knowing the zombies are drawn to the necroshard, the characters might decide that letting the zombies have the damnable thing is the best course of action. Tossing the necroshard out an open door, however, does little to dissuade the hungry undead from their secondary goal: eating the characters. In addition, the zombie that ends up with the necroshard is instantly transformed into a shard zombie (see Zombie Siege: Second Wave) and is added to the number of zombies breaching the characters defenses the next time they fail a primary skill check in the Zombie-Proofing the Temple or Shoring Up the Defenses skill challenges.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The necroshard provides dim illumination.

Ceiling: The ceiling in this area is 10 feet high.

Altar: The small altar here is dedicated to Orcus. However, a DC 15 Perception check reveals that it was once dedicated to Erathis and later desecrated.

Beds: The beds are difficult terrain that provides cover.

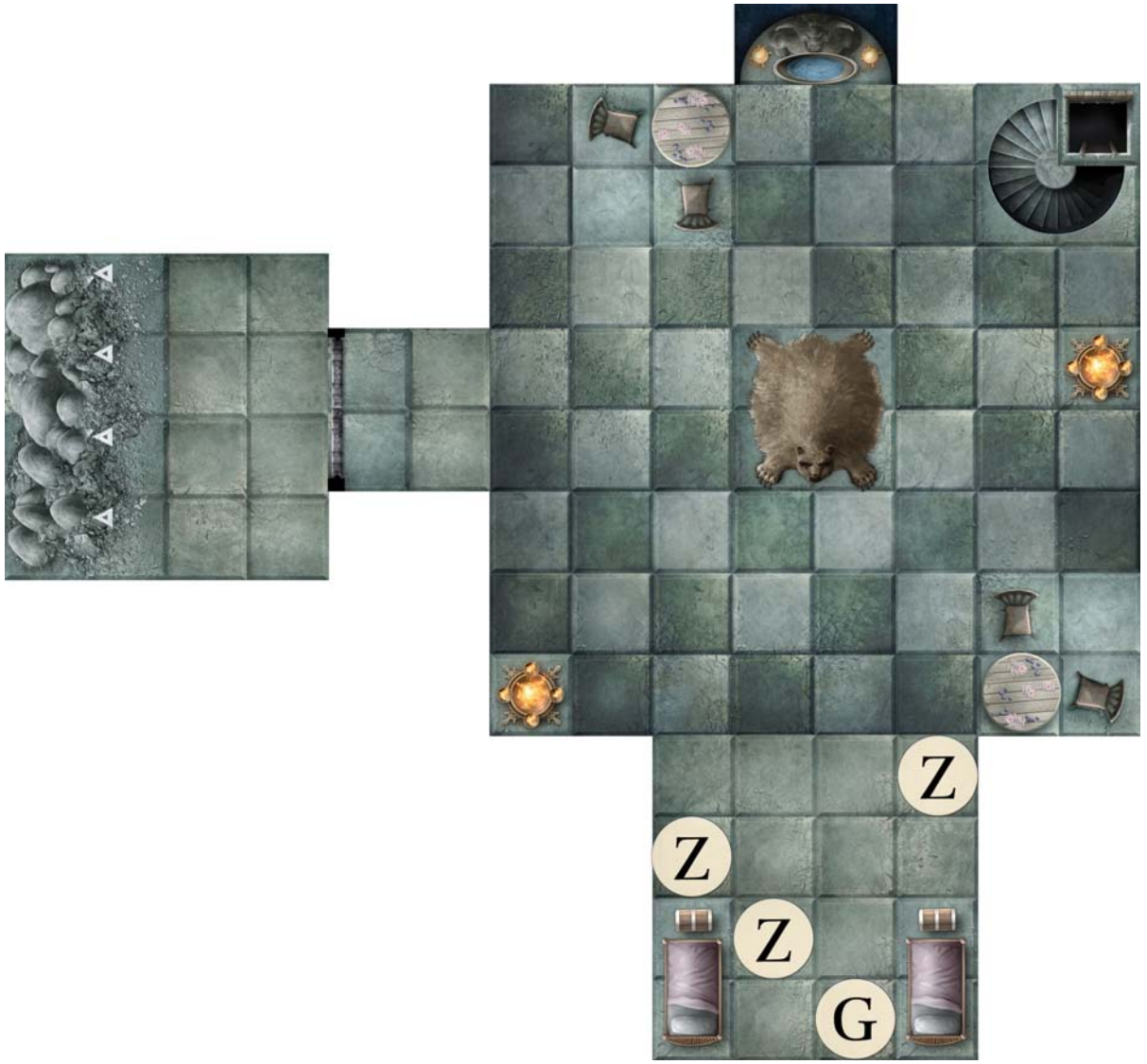
Braziers: If lit, the two braziers provide bright illumination out to 4 squares.

Doors: The doors along the east wall are jammed, swelled and rusted with age. Opening these doors requires a DC 15 Strength check. Beyond the doors is an impassable, rubble choked passageway that may lead to other parts of the temple.

Footlockers: The footlockers are locked, but can be opened with a DC 10 Thievery check. They contain rotting clerical vestments and objects used in the worship of Orcus.

Tables and Chairs: The tables and chairs are difficult terrain.

Treasure: If the characters search the adventurers' corpses, they can identify Doran Underhelm by a tattoo of two crossed axes on his left forearm. As Farian promised, Doran has the rogue's 100-gp payment and a pair of small diamonds (worth 100 gp each) in a large pouch on his belt.



Zombie Siege: The Siege Begins

Encounter Level 2+ (XP 614+)

Zombie-Proofing the Temple
3+ zombie rotters
1+ zombie soldiers

Setup

The sun has set and darkness has fallen over the temple. Now that the characters have dealt with the zombies in the temple and identified the necroshard, the real fun begins. Right after the characters identify the necroshard (see area 2), they hear a terrific commotion above them and outside the temple interior. At this point, they should race up the stairs to investigate.

When the characters reach the temple interior, read:

Outside the temple, the forest is filled with a cacophony of agonized moaning and screaming that turns your blood to ice. Through the main entrance of the temple, you see a truly horrific sight. The forest, lit by shafts of pale moonlight, is alive with rotting corpses clawing their way free from shallow graves. You try to count their numbers, but soon realize there is little point. The undead horde appears to approach several hundred, if not several thousand, members. There is nowhere to run; stiff, shambling forms fill the landscape as far as you can see in every direction. The dubious safety of the temple is now your only hope of survival.

Zombie-Proofing the Temple

The zombies and other undead animated by the necroshard are sluggish at first, and many of them must claw their way free from the earth. This gives the characters a few precious minutes to barricade the doors and set up their defenses. Use this skill challenge to represent fortifying the temple.

Level: 2 (XP 375).

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Athletics, Dungeoneering, Religion, Theivery.

Athletics (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character realizes finesse is no trade for quick and effective physical labor. The character pounds nails, carries heavy objects, and uses brute strength shove invading zombies back through the doors.

Dungeoneering (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character's knowledge of stone and underground construction lets him or her see how the temple might best be fortified using the meager supplies available.

Religion (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character offers a prayer to Erathis, asking her to lend her strength to the characters' endeavor and slow the tide of undead seeking to further desecrate her temple.

Thievery (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character has spent a lifetime getting into places he or she is not wanted. It's not terribly difficult to turn that concept on its head and use those skills to craft sturdy barricades.

Secondary Skills: Perception.

Perception (DC 5, minor action, no successes): The character's keen eyes help more skilled companions find the best materials to aid in fortifying the temple. A successful check grants a +2 bonus to one ally's next Dungeoneering or Thievery check made as part of this skill challenge.

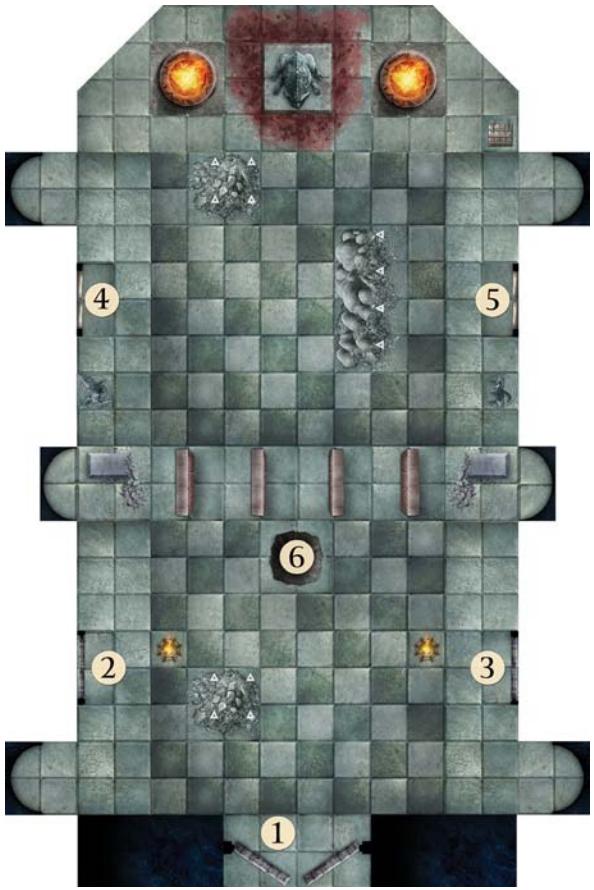
We Can Make It!

At some point, the players might think fighting their way through the zombie horde is a better option than remaining in the temple and enduring an undead siege. If this option comes up, let the players get a good look at what they're facing.

You look out upon a nightmarish scene. Hundreds of animated corpses crowd around the temple, three and four rows deep. Humans, dwarves, elves, and every conceivable race, both civilized and savage, are represented among the shambling horde. Worse yet, the corpses of dinosaurs, dire animals, and even more fantastic beasts add their mass and strength to the zombie assault.

Despite the zombies' numbers, there are still gaps in their ranks; gaps the fleet and nimble among you might use to escape the multitudes of undead. However, as if the gods were reading your thoughts, a stag suddenly bursts from cover and runs a bounding course through the advancing zombies. Hope soars within you as the stag easily dodges the clumsy blows of the first few undead it encounters ... before the great, animated corpse of a tyrannosaurus rex surges from the mass of undead bodies surrounding the temple and snaps the stag up in its colossal jaws. The stag utters a single bleat of pain and surprise before the zombie T-rex's jaws slam down, stifling the stag's cries in a gout of blood. A wriggling pile of smaller zombies quickly forms around the undead dinosaur, eager for the gobbets of flesh falling from its mouth.

The stag provides only a momentary distraction for the zombie horde. In seconds, there is little left of the poor beast beyond a crimson smear on the ground. But there is fresher fare still to be had, and the masses of undead press in, clawing at your hastily erected defenses and creating an impassable wall of rotting flesh.



Success: The characters succeed in fortifying the temple and buy themselves some time before the next wave of zombies.

Failure: Each time the characters fail a primary skill check, a group of three zombie rotters and a single zombie soldier breaks through the characters' hastily erected defenses. This encounter uses only the six visible entry points in the temple (numbered 1 though 6): the main door, the two sets of doors along the east and west walls, and the pit in the floor. Roll 1d6 to determine which entry point the zombies break through.

Zombie Soldier	**Level 2 Soldier**
Medium natural animate	XP 125
Initiative +2	**Senses** Perception +2; darkvision
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19	
AC 18; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 13; **Will** 13	
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will)	
+8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.	
↯ **Protective Strike** (immediate interrupt, when an adjacent foe attacks a zombie rotter; at-will)	
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to the triggering attack.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 16 (+4)	**Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+1)

The characters can't really fail here; otherwise, they would be overrun by zombies and massacred. Instead, a failure represents bad timing and sloppy execution. They still erect the defenses; they just have to fight off more zombies while doing so. See the "Man the Defenses" sidebar for more details on this skill challenge.

Special: The skill challenge simulates the characters fighting off zombies while fortifying the temple's defenses. Note that these two events happen simultaneously. On any round that the characters do not attempt at least one primary skill check, it counts as a failure and more zombies breach the characters' defenses.

Tactics

The zombie soldier remains close to a zombie rotter during combat, using *protective strike* to hamper the characters attacks against the zombie minions. The zombie rotters simply attack the closest character, flailing away with slam attacks.

3 Zombie Rotters	**Level 3 Minion**
Medium natural animate	XP 38
Initiative -1	**Senses** Perception -1; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 13; **Fortitude** 13; **Reflex** 9; **Will** 10	
Immune disease; poison	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 5 damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 6 (-1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)

Man the Defenses!

The Zombie-Proofing the Temple and Shoring Up the Defenses skill challenges are only peripherally concerned with the manual labor of fortifying the temple or repairing barricades. They're mostly concerned with getting the temple barricaded or getting the defenses repaired before the zombies overwhelm the heroes. A primary skill check failure does not mean the character didn't use the proper materials or flawless construction techniques. Rather, it represents bad timing: A zombie manages to squirm through a hole in the wall before the character can nail a board over it; a zombie slams through a door before the character can throw his weight against it. In addition, failing the skill challenge doesn't mean the zombies overwhelm the heroes; it means the characters were less efficient than they could have been, and they had to fight more zombies as a result.

Zombie Siege: First Wave

Encounter Level 3+ (XP 702+)

2 gravehounds
4 zombie rotters
2 zombie soldiers

Setup

Not long after the characters erect their defenses, the zombie horde, now at full strength, makes a serious push to gain entrance into the temple. When this encounter begins, 2 grave hounds, 4 zombie rotters, and 2 zombie soldiers have managed to break into the temple. The characters need to fight off the zombies that make it inside while repairing their breached defenses.

When the attack begins, read:
The temple is filled with a cacophony of thick, horrid moaning and the staccato rhythm of hundreds of undead fists beating against the temple doors. Suddenly, a sharp cracking noise echoes through the temple, and you realize your defenses have been breached!

For this encounter and the next one, there are eight numbered entry points into the temple, although only six are visible to the characters: the main door, the two sets of doors along the east and west walls, and the pit in the floor. The remaining two entrances are tunnels dug by the zombies that open up in the floor of the temple, creating a pit just like the one currently visible. If one of the tunnel entrances is rolled, replace the rubble square with a pit, which remains visible for the rest of the encounter.

When the encounter begins, spilt the initial group of zombies into two groups of 1 grave hound, 2 zombie rotters, and 1 zombie soldier, and then roll a d8 twice (reroll duplicate rolls) to determine which two entry points the first wave of zombies breaches.

Shoring Up the Defenses

During the battle, the characters need to repair their defenses to prevent more zombies from breaking into the temple.

Level: 2 (XP 125)

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures).

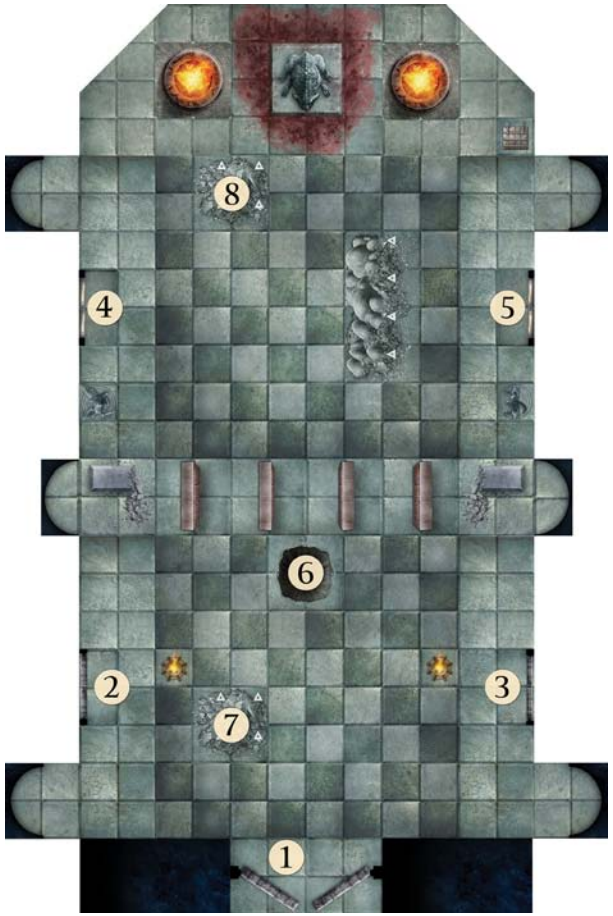
Primary Skills: Athletics, Dungeoneering, Religion, Thievery.

Athletics (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character realizes finesse is no trade for quick and effective physical labor. The character pounds nails, carries heavy objects, and uses brute strength shove invading zombies back through the doors.

Dungeoneering (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character's knowledge of stone and underground construction lets him or her see how the temple might best be fortified using the meager supplies available.

Religion (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character offers a prayer to Erathis, asking her to lend her strength to the characters' endeavor and slow the tide of undead seeking to further desecrate her temple.

Thievery (DC 15, standard action, 1 success, no maximum): The character has spent a lifetime getting into places he or she is not wanted. It's not terribly difficult to turn that concept on its head and use those skills to craft sturdy barricades.



Secondary Skills: Perception.

Perception (DC 5, minor action, no successes): The character's keen eyes help more skilled companions find the best materials to aid in fortifying the temple. A successful check grants a +2 bonus to one ally's next Dungeoneering or Thievery check made as part of this skill challenge.

Success: The characters succeed in repairing their defenses, and only face the initial number of zombies.

Failure: Each time the characters fail a primary skill check, two more zombie rotters enter the combat (roll 1d8 to determine which entry point they breach). If the characters score three failures (a complete failure), an additional zombie solider enters the fray from one of the breached entry points (roll randomly). The characters cannot accrue failures by failing skill checks. Instead, a failure represents bad timing and sloppy execution by the characters. They still repair the defenses; they just have to fight off more zombies while doing it. See the "Man the Defenses" sidebar on page 32 for more details.

Special: The skill challenge simulates the characters fighting off zombies while fortifying the temple's defenses. Note that these two events happen simultaneously. On any round that the characters do not attempt at least one primary skill check, it counts as a failure and more zombies breach the characters' defenses.

2 Gravehounds **Level 3 Brute**
Medium natural animate XP 150
Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +1; low-light vision
HP 54; **Bloodied** 27
AC 14; **Fortitude** 14; **Reflex** 12; **Will** 11
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 8
(+) **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends) and is knocked prone.
† **Death Jaws** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**
The gravehound makes a bite attack against a target within its reach.
Zombie Weakness
Any critical hit to the zombie reduces it to 0 hit points instantly.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)

4+ Zombie Rotters **Level 3 Minion**
Medium natural animate XP 38
Initiative -1 **Senses** Perception -1; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 13; **Fortitude** 13; **Reflex** 9; **Will** 10
Immune disease; poison
Speed 4
(+) **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 5 damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 6 (-1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)

2+ Zombie Soldier **Level 2 Soldier**
Medium natural animate XP 125
Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +2; darkvision
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 18; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 13; **Will** 13
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 6
(+) **Longsword** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.
† **Protective Strike** (immediate interrupt, when an adjacent foe attacks a zombie rotter; at-will)
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage, and the target takes a -4 penalty to the triggering attack.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 10 (+1)

Tactics

The zombie rotters attack the closest living creature with slam attacks, while the zombie soldier remains close to the rotters, granting them the benefits of its *protective strike*. The grave hounds also attack the nearest living target, bearing characters to the ground with their bite attacks.

Development

If the characters fight off the zombies and complete the skill challenge, they buy themselves another few hours of reprieve. However, the zombie horde is not done with the characters yet, and another, stronger push is on the way.

Hey, I Know That Zombie!

If your players have played through other Chaos Scar adventures, you might want to have a villain from the past show up as a zombie. Zombified versions of The Hand of Torog from *Den of the Slavetakers*, the halflings from the *Brothers Grey*, or bullywugs from *Stick in the Mud* all work well. In addition to serving as a fun Easter egg for your players, the appearance of these villains clearly demonstrates the far-reaching power of the necroshard.

Zombie Siege: Second Wave

Encounter Level 4+ (XP 927+)

2 corruption corpses
2 hobgoblin zombies
1 shard zombie
6 zombie rotters

Setup

After a short reprieve, the zombie horde makes a stronger push to overrun the characters. This encounter is handled much like the previous one and uses the Shoring up the Defenses skill challenge while the characters battle zombies. However, the second wave encounter includes a few significant changes:

- The initial group of breaching zombies includes a new type of zombie unique to the necromantic energies of the necroshard. The shard zombie is both intelligent and powerful, and would be an ideal candidate to insert a familiar face, as mentioned in the "Hey, I Know That Zombie" sidebar. In addition to the shard zombie, 2 corruption corpses, 2 hobgoblin zombies, and 6 zombie rotters comprise the initial group of zombies the character face in this encounter. Like the first encounter, divide the zombies into two groups, and then roll 1d8 twice to determine the two entry points the undead breach.

2 Corruption Corpses **Level 4 Artillery**
Medium natural animate **XP 175**

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +3; darkvision
Grave Stench aura 1; living enemies in the aura take a -5 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23
Regeneration 5 (if the corruption corpse takes radiant damage, regeneration doesn't function on its next turn)
AC 17; **Fortitude** 16; **Reflex** 14; **Will** 14
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 4

Slam (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.

Mote of Corruption (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
The corruption corpse hurls a black glob of necrotic filth: ranged 10; +7 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).

Death Burst (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**
The corruption corpse explodes: close burst 1; +7 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 necrotic damage.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 16 (+5) **Int** 4 (-1) **Cha** 3 (-2)

- Run the Shoring up the Defenses skill challenge again. However, this time, when the characters fail a primary skill check, three zombie rotters break through and join the combat. If the characters completely fail the skill challenge (earn three failures), an additional corruption corpse breaks through and joins the combat. Remember, even if the characters fail the skill challenge completely, they still manage to repair their defenses and hold off the zombie horde. They just have to fight a lot more zombies to accomplish the same goal.

2 Hobgoblin Zombies **Level 2 Brute**
Medium natural animate **XP 125**

Initiative -1 **Senses** Perception +0; darkvision
HP 40; **Bloodied** 20
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 11; **Will** 12
Immune disease; poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 4

Slam (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 2d6 + 2 damage.

Zombie Grab (standard; requires a free hand; at-will)
+4 vs. Reflex; the target is grabbed (until escape). Checks made to escape the zombie's grab are made with a -5 penalty.

Zombie Weakness
A critical hit to a hobgoblin zombie reduces it to 0 hit points instantly.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 6 (-1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1) **Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)

Shard Zombie **Level 4 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid **XP 175**

Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 57; **Bloodied** 28
AC 18; **Fortitude** 15; **Reflex** 15; **Will** 15
Resist 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 6

Slam (standard; at-will)
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.

Claw of Doom (standard; at-will)
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Fortitude; a shadowy claw slides the target 3 squares, and one zombie ally adjacent to the target after the slide makes a melee basic attack against the target.

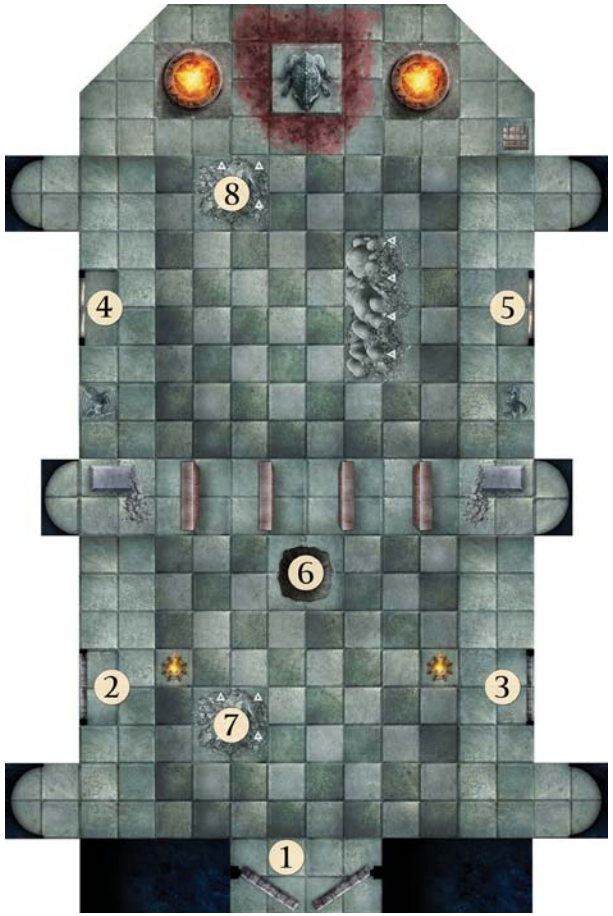
Speed of the Damned (standard; at-will)
Close burst 10; up to four zombie rotters; targets make a melee basic attack.

Arise, Corpse (standard; encounter)
Four zombie rotters appear in unoccupied squares adjacent to the shard zombie.

Undead Tenacity
When a zombie rotter within 2 squares of the shard zombie hits a creature, it grabs that creature.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 11 (+2) **Wis** 16 (+5)
Con 17 (+5) **Int** 17 (+5) **Cha** 11 (+2)

6+ Zombie Rotters	Level 3 Minion
Medium natural animate	XP 38
Initiative -1	**Senses** Perception -1; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 13; **Fortitude** 13; **Reflex** 9; **Will** 10	
Immune disease; poison	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
+6 vs. AC; 5 damage.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** –
Str 14 (+3)	**Dex** 6 (-1) **Wis** 8 (+0)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 1 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-3)



Tactics

The hobgoblin zombies and zombie rotters attack the closest characters with *slam* attacks. The corruption corpses begin combat at range, hurling *motes of corruption* at characters until the heroes engage them in melee. The shard zombie remains within 2 squares of the zombie rotters so they can benefit from *undead tenacity*. It uses *claw of doom* to drag characters using ranged attacks or spells into melee and *speed of the damned* when three or more zombie rotters surround a single hero. The shard zombie uses *arise, corpse* when half the initial zombie rotters have been destroyed.

Development

If the characters can survive this last assault, they are witness to a glorious sight after the last zombie falls.

When the characters defeat the last zombie in this encounter, read:

The zombie shudders and collapses as the energy animating its rotting body dissipates from your attack. You turn toward the main doors, expecting another wave of fiendish undead. Instead, the temple interior is suddenly filled with shafts of pale, morning sunshine, bursting through the cracks and holes in the doors and walls. You then realize the forest outside the temple walls has become still and quiet.

Dawn has come, and the power of the necroshard fades in the light of the morning sun. The characters have survived the night. However, when they finally exit the temple, one more horror awaits.

Is That All You Got?

If the characters have had an easy time of it, and the zombie assaults have not proved sufficiently challenging, simply throw another Zombie Siege encounter at them before dawn's arrival. However, each time you run a Zombie Siege beyond the two presented in the adventure, use progressively tougher zombies, or even other types of corporeal undead, such as ghouls and wights.

When the characters exit the temple, read:

The clearing around the temple is littered with hundreds of bodies, from tiny, shrunken goblin corpses to the behemoth carcass of what appears to be a dragon. Corpses are stacked up against each of the temple doors ten and twenty high, and the stench of rot and death fills the air in a nauseating miasma

Conclusion: What to Do with the Necroshard?

The characters could simply leave the necroshard in the temple, but its power would continue to grow, and eventually an unstoppable horde of zombies would sweep out of the Chaos Scar and into civilized lands. This is certainly reason enough to destroy it. However, if certain precautions are taken, the power of the necroshard can be harnessed and used by the characters.

Destroying the Shard

If the characters decide to destroy the necroshard, they find it is almost impervious to attacks. However, surviving the zombie horde earns them the favor of Erathis, especially if one or more characters managed to beseech aid from the goddess during the zombie siege. A simple DC 10 Religion check grants the characters divine insight on how the necroshard can be destroyed.

Destroying the Necroshard

The altar in the temple rectory can be reconsecrated, and once the altar is again a divine conduit for the power of Erathis, the necroshard can be destroyed by placing it on the altar and performing a ritual, represented by this skill challenge.

Level: 2 (XP 250).

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skill: Religion.

Religion (DC 10, 1 success, no maximum): You call upon the power of Erathis to destroy the necroshard. You gain a +2 bonus to this check if you received divine aid from Erathis during the Zombie-Proofing the Temple and Shoring Up the Defenses skill challenges.

Other Skills: Diplomacy, Dungeoneering.

Diplomacy (DC 10, no successes): Erathis is the goddess of civilization and community, and is known to be both diplomatic and reasonable. You're no cleric, but your silver tongue might sway the goddess to aid you in your endeavor. You grant a +2 bonus to one ally's next Religion check made as part of this skill challenge.

Dungeoneering (DC 15, no successes): You use your knowledge of stonework to remove all traces of evil iconography from the altar. On a success, all Religion checks made as part of this skill challenge gain a +2 bonus.

Success: Erathis lends her divine power to the characters, the altar is reconsecrated, and the necroshard is destroyed in a blast of white light. The characters gain an additional 250 XP for destroying the necroshard. In addition, Erathis's followers hear of the characters' deed, and their favorable opinion of the heroes could take the form of a number of future benefits.

Failure: If the characters fail the skill challenge, allow them try again with a -2 penalty to all checks. However, if they fail the skill challenge a second time, they fail to destroy the necroshard, and in the process, they offend Erathis. Until they can divine some way to destroy the necroshard—perhaps by beseeching aid from a high priest of a good-aligned deity—they receive a -1 penalty to all Diplomacy checks.

Keeping the Shard

If the characters decide to keep the necroshard, they can harness its power by placing it in the hilt of a weapon. Encasing the shard in metal is the only safe way for it to be handled; however, even if the characters take this precaution, the necroshard can still be dangerous to its owner and his or her allies.

Necroshard Weapon **Level 5+**

This large black gem can be placed in the hilt of a melee weapon imbuing the weapon with necrotic power.

Lvl 5	+1	1,000 gp	Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp
Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	Lvl 25	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	Lvl 30	+6	3,125,000 gp

Weapon (Any One-Handed or Two-Handed Melee Weapon)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d10 necrotic damage per plus.
Property: Weapon attacks made with the weapon against living creatures gain a +1 bonus on attack rolls vs. Fortitude.
Power (Daily ✦ Necrotic): Free Action: Use this power when you hit with the weapon. The target takes an extra 1d8 necrotic damage and is weakened until the end of your next turn.
Level 15 or 20: 2d8 necrotic damage.
Level 25 or 30: 3d8 necrotic damage.

About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel is a staff writer and editor for Goodman Games, a freelance writer and RPG designer, and the editor-in-chief of the 4E magazine *Level Up*. He has been a professional game designer since 2005, and his recent author credits include *Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens, Critter Cache: Daemons*, and *Hero's Handbook: Tiefling*. Aeryn currently lives in Modesto, California with his wife Melissa, a nongamer whose tolerance for her husband's geekery borders on the supernatural.

The Crossroads

An adventure for 2nd-level characters

By Rodney Thompson

illustrations by Vincent Dutrait ✦ cartography by Sean Macdonald

Just beyond the remnants of the King's Wall, at the edge of the Chaos Scar, a dirt path leads from civilization into the heart of this dangerous valley. Right off the edge of this path sits a place known to travelers as the Crossroads (though, in truth, only the one path passes through this area). Here, at the edge of the Chaos Scar, is where the fringes of civilization and the edge of danger meet. Not coincidentally, this is also the place where those brave enough to venture even just inside the edge of the Chaos Scar come to meet with some of the more entrepreneurial inhabitants of the valley. It is just distant enough from the closest settlements and bastions of order that those of less honorable origin can come to sell their wares and services. And it is likewise just far enough from the Chaos Scar that those seeking such wares and services can come without too much fear of trouble—although this is still a lawless area. It is a rough place, like the Scar beyond it, but this waypoint is used by many adventurers (and the bravest of merchants and traders) as a final stopping place before entering the Chaos Scar proper.

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The Gibbet Tree

Riding into the Crossroads, the first sight to greet a visitor's eyes is the massive structure known as the gibbet tree. This tall, metal structure has a number of bars that branch off from a thick, metal central post, from which hang a number of broad metal cages. Many of the intelligent monstrous races that live within the confines of the Chaos Scar use the gibbet tree as a form of punishment and a warning to anyone who would consider entering their domain.

Hobgoblins, orcs, gnolls, and other races inhabiting the Scar bring live captives to the Crossroads and stuff them within the cages of the gibbet tree, where they are left to die a slow, agonizing death from thirst and starvation.

When the characters first arrive at the Crossroads, they will almost certainly see the gibbet tree immediately, as all visitors entering from civilization do. The gibbet tree serves as a warning that anyone thinking of entering the Chaos Scar had best turn back, because intruders are dealt with harshly.

Cries for Help

When the heroes approach, they will find that they have arrived while a prisoner in the gibbet tree is begging his captors for his life. Should the heroes try to intervene, the hobgoblin guards stationed there do not take kindly to their meddling. To give your players more incentive, feel free to have the prisoner be someone they met earlier in their adventuring careers. If they choose to ignore it, they must listen to the prisoner's cries for the duration of their stay at the Crossroads.

If the characters do come to the prisoner's rescue, they must deal with the hobgoblins. See the "Hobgoblin Hangmen" encounter below for how to deal with this situation. If the characters manage to rescue the prisoner, he is not only very grateful but offers to lead the characters back into the valley to recover the bodies of his former companions.

The Trading Post

The main structure, and the reason why most visitors come to the Crossroads, is the trading post that has been erected there. A two-story building that looks vaguely like a mushroom, with a second floor wider than the first, this building looks old and appears to be in ill repair. Most of the wood has grayed from constant exposure to the elements, and most of the shutters on the windows have large holes punched in them, if they haven't simply rotted away. A sign above the door depicts a wagon being drawn by oxen, the only indication this is more than just an abandoned building.

This trading post is where brave merchants from civilization come to deal with the monstrous races of the Chaos Scar. Many adventurers who meet their end in the Chaos Scar leave behind magic and unique items, which the inhabitants of the valley are only happy to sell or trade to unscrupulous merchants. The traders get their hands on magic items, and the monsters get their hands on contraband smuggled by the traders. All such details occur at the Crossroads

Millen Silvereye

One of the only people that can claim to be a real resident of the Crossroads is a tiefling man called Millen Silvereye. According to local rumor, Millen was permanently scarred by a run-in with a mind flayer. The encounter turned one of Millen's eyes to solid silver and gave him amazing prescience, allowing him to see into the future a short distance.

The truth, while far less exciting, isn't that different. Millen, a modestly talented wielder of psionic power, has cultivated his skills and can see beyond the immediate future. He uses this power to predict what the value of an item might be, looking into its future to see its ultimate destiny, acting as an appraiser for goods brought to the Crossroads for trade. In exchange for a small cut of each transaction, Millen serves as a neutral arbiter of value whom both traders and the inhabitants of the valley have come to trust. His silver eye is merely a replacement he had crafted after the eye was cut out by an orc chieftain who was unhappy with the value he gave an item.

Fulgrim, Pelt Trader

Present at the trading post when the heroes arrive is a half-orc scavenger named Fulgrim. Fulgrim deals in the pelts of exotic creatures that live in the Chaos Scar. He waits until others, usually adventurers, have slain a number of dangerous creatures and then comes in behind them to claim their pelts and skins for himself. Many of these pelts are considered to be valuable commodities by traders. For example, one year, owlbear-skin cloaks were all the rage among nobles of a nearby city, and Fulgrim was only too happy to provide pelts to traders who came to the Crossroads. Fulgrim has currently brought a collection of thick behemoth hides to trade with a caravan of dwarves; the dwarves expect to use the hides to make armor before an expedition deeper into the Chaos Scar.

Getting Black Market Access **Level 3**
Skill Challenge XP 150

You try to convince Millen Silvereye to sell you some of the black market goods hidden at the Crossroads trading post.

When the characters arrive at the trading post, they should catch on that more than just pelt trading goes on here. In fact, the dwarves of the caravan seem a bit unnerved by the presence of adventurers, as though afraid of being caught dealing with Millen. He clearly has more to offer than simple appraisal.

Complexity
1 (requires 4 successes before 3 failures)

Primary Skills
Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate, Streetwise

Other Skills
Bluff, Perception

Victory
The characters convince Millen to let them see his secret wares. Millen offers up two magic items for sale at 90% of market price. These magic items are all level 3 or lower, chosen by the DM. He also tries to trick the characters with his favorite scheme (see "The Treasure Trap" below).

Defeat
Millen does not offer the characters any of his real wares, but instead only pretends to deal with them, attempting to lure them into his scheme (see "The Treasure Trap" below).

Diplomacy (DC 10)
The character appeals to Millen's business sense, convincing him that they will make good (and discrete) customers and that he should deal with them.

Insight (DC 10)
The character senses Millen's caution and reluctance, and knows to convince Millen that he won't bring any trouble to the trading post.

Intimidate (DC 15)
The character tries to convince Millen that refusing them would be very bad for his health. Millen's reluctance begins to melt away when he realizes that they could probably just take what they wanted.

Streetwise (DC 10)
The character recognizes that dealing in black market goods requires a certain attitude and approach, which usually involves talking around the subject of the conversation rather than speak of it directly. The character knows the lingo that Millen expects a discrete buyer to use.

Bluff or Perception (DC 15)
The character notices (or tricks Millen into revealing) that no one expected them to arrive, and that the characters may have interrupted some clandestine trading. This grants the character a +2 bonus to Insight or Streetwise checks for the remainder of the skill challenge.

The Boneyard

Away from the main road is a sunken depression in the earth known as the boneyard. This is where the remains of bodies from the gibbet tree are tossed when a cage needs to be cleaned out for a new occupant. The boneyard is a crude graveyard full of unmarked graves, shallow pits, and mounds of freshly churned earth. The necrotic energy from so many tortured bodies has given unlife to a number of zombies that now roam the boneyard, hungry for the flesh of the living.

The Treasure Trap

One of Millen Silvereye's favorite schemes involves using the boneyard as a trap for the greedy. The ruse begins when new traders or naïve adventurers arrive at the Crossroads looking for contraband or black market magic items. If Millen believes he can fool them, he pretends to barter for a number of magic items until he has come to an agreement with the traders. With the deal done, Millen provides the traders with a map of the boneyard, claiming that, to keep from being killed and robbed, he keeps his valuables buried in empty graves in the boneyard. With the supposed location of these hiding places marked on the map, he sends them off to the boneyard, where the zombies waiting there invariably kill the traders. Millen waits until the zombies' hunger is sated before going into the boneyard to recover any valuables the victims might have carried.

Millen will try to trick the characters into falling into his trap, even if he has to sell them a few items first to win their confidence. He doesn't care about giving away a few items, since he plans to reclaim them once the zombies have finished with the characters. See the "Into the Boneyard" encounter, and then the "Inside the Trading Post" encounter if the characters return to confront Millen.

Hobgoblin Hangmen

Encounter Level 3 (850 XP)

Setup

This encounter may occur whenever the characters investigate the gibbet tree and decide to intervene. The hobgoblins have recently captured a human thief who tried to rob their base of operations deeper in the valley. They brought the thief here to face a slow, agonizing death. The captive is still alive, but the three hobgoblin deathwatchers assigned to guard the gibbet tree are tiring of his begging. If the heroes decide to intervene and free the man, the hobgoblins try to stop them. Alternatively, this scene could occur if the heroes are captured in the valley and brought here to be put in the gibbet tree themselves.

Gibbet zombies (G)
2 raven swarms (R)
3 hobgoblin deathwatchers (H)

When the heroes approach, read or paraphrase the following aloud:

The sound of harsh words spoken in a guttural language nearly drowns out the cries for mercy coming from ahead. Looming over the path is what appears to be a massive metal frame resembling a tree, from which hang a number of metal cages. Rotting corpses occupy most of the cages, though a malnourished human prisoner reaches out from between the bars of one cage, pleading with three stern-looking hobgoblins to set him free.

Tactics

The hobgoblins are deathwatchers, set in place to ensure that prisoners left in the gibbets die the slow, agonizing deaths they deserve. They fight to prevent anyone from intervening in the punishment of captives, and they try and drive enemies away from the cages, or slay them if they are persistent. They have been letting the ravens feed on the corpses, so if anyone starts a fight with the hobgoblins the raven swarms come to the rescue. The hobgoblins are also aware of the gibbet zombies, and if an enemy tries to get close they sometimes allow the zombies to grab those enemies before hitting them with *prisoner's lament*.

Features of the Area

Illumination: During the daytime, there is little to obscure the sunlight, so the area around the gibbet tree is well lit. At night, light from the trading post (and the moon, if present) illuminates the gibbets, casting the entire area in dim light.

Gibbet Tree: The gibbet tree is a massive metal structure designed to hold the gibbets in the air, keeping them around 5 feet off of the ground. The tree's frame is made of thick black iron, and has lasted for many years without bending or rusting appreciably.

Ground: The ground below the gibbet tree is covered in filth and muck, but, like the rest of the area, should provide no significant impediment.

3 Hobgoblin Deathwatchers (H)		**Level 3 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid		XP 150
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision	
HP 46; **Bloodied** 23		
AC 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13		
Speed 6		
(+) **Deathwatcher Pike** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
Reach 2; +10 vs. AC; 1d10+4 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the hobgoblin deathwatcher's next turn.		
↓ **Pinning Pike** (opportunity action, when a marked target makes an attack that does not include the hobgoblin deathwatcher; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
Reach 2; targets the triggering creature; +10 vs. AC; 1d10+4 damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the deathwatcher's next turn.		
↓ **Prisoner's Lament** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
Targets grabbed, restrained, or immobilized targets only; Reach 2; +12 vs. AC; 1d10+8 damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to skill checks and saves until the end of the deathwatcher's next turn.		
✧ **Clearing Pike** (standard; when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**		
Close burst 2; targets enemies in burst; +10 vs. AC; 1d10+4 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.		
Hobgoblin Resilience (immediate reaction, when the hobgoblin deathwatcher suffers an effect that a save can end; encounter)		
The hobgoblin deathwatcher rolls a saving throw against the triggering effect.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Goblin	
Skills Athletics +9		
Str 17 (+4)	**Dex** 15 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 8 (+0)	**Cha** 7 (-1)
Equipment deathwatch pike, scale armor		

2 Raven Swarms (R)	Level 2 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast (swarm)	XP 125

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
Swarm Attack aura 1; each enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 damage.
HP 34; **Bloodied** 17
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13
Speed 6 fly

Beaks and Talons (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 2d4+4 damage.

Feasting Ravens (standard; at-will)
The raven swarm shifts up to its speed, can shift through squares occupied by enemies, and makes the following attack once against each enemy whose square it enters: +5 vs. AC; 1d4+4 damage.

Blur of Black (move; at-will)
The raven swarm moves up to its speed, and can move through squares occupied by enemies.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –

Str 12 (+2)	**Dex** 16 (+4)	**Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 10 (+1)	**Int** 2 (-3)	**Cha** 10 (+1)

Gibbet Zombies (G)	Level 3 Lurker
Hazard	XP 150

These gibbets hang like fruit from a large metal tree. Inside, rotting corpses—some fresher than others—lean against the bars of the cages.

Hazard: Corpses in gibbets animated by undeath reach out to grab the living.

Perception:
No check is necessary to notice the gibbets.

Trigger:
A creature ends its turn adjacent to a gibbet.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee**
Target: The triggering creature.
Attack: +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is grabbed until escape (Acrobatics or Athletics, DC 10)

Countermeasures
If any gibbet takes more than 10 points of damage, the zombie inside is destroyed and creatures no longer trigger this hazard for ending adjacent to that gibbet.

Inside the Trading Post

Encounter Level 3 (800 XP)

Setup

This encounter takes place if the heroes try and bully Fulgrim and the dwarves into letting them in on the black market dealings, or it could occur when the heroes confront Millen after he tries to direct them into an ambush in the boneyard. Since the dwarves and Fulgrim have business together, they fight together, and they will defend Millen if the characters try to rough up the tiefling appraiser.

Fulgrim (F)
Millen Silvereye (M)
Dwarf caravan master (D)
4 **dwarf caravan guard** (G)

When the characters first enter the trading post, read or paraphrase the following:

The inside of this building looks to be only marginally cleaner than the wilderness outside. The ground floor of the building is host to a wide open area where several benches are arrayed for the display of wares. A group of dwarves is picking through what looks to be animal hides on one table, while a weathered half-orc watches them closely. A lithe tiefling man with the hood of his robe pulled up turns to look at you as you enter, gazing at you with what appears to be one eye made completely of silver.

Fulgrim (F) **Level 3 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid, half-orc XP 150
Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +8
HP 40; **Bloodied** 20
AC 17; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 12, **Will** 14
Speed 6
Handaxe (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d6+3 damage.
Axe Throw (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 5/10; +8 vs. AC; 1d6+3 damage.
Hook and Hold (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires handaxe; +6 vs. Fort; 1d6+3 damage, and the target is grabbed. The target grants combat advantage to Fulgrim while grabbed.
Hostage Strike (immediate interrupt, when hit by a melee or ranged attack; at-will)
A creature Fulgrim is grabbing takes the damage from the triggering attack.
Combat Advantage
Fulgrim's attacks against creatures granting him combat advantage deal an extra 1d6 damage on a hit, and the target is pushed the target 2 squares.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Stealth +7
Str 13 (+2) **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 15 (+3)
Con 16 (+4) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 14 (+3)
Equipment 4 hand axes, leather armor

Tactics

When a fight breaks out, the caravan guards move into positions where they can use *focused guard* on Fulgrim, Millen, and their caravan master respectively. Millen tends to stay near the rear of the conflict or ascend to the second floor, psychically hurling small objects such as lanterns, pewter mugs, and coins like projectile weapons at the characters. Fulgrim tries to catch any characters that stay too close to the edge of the fight with his *hook and hold* attack, using them as a human shield while letting the dwarves do the bulk of the fighting. If the caravan guards get too far from their charges, the caravan master uses *caravan driver* to get them back into proper position.

Millen Silvereye (M) **Level 2 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, tiefling XP 125
Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +3
HP 37; **Bloodied** 18
AC 16; **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 4
Speed 6
Quarterstaff (standard; at-will)
+7 vs. AC; 1d8+5 damage.
Hurl Object (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. Reflex; 2d4+4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of Millen's next turn.
Kneel! (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Area burst 1 within 10; +4 vs. Will; 1d6+6 psychic damage, and the target is knocked prone.
Psionic Augment (free, when Millen hits with a *quarterstaff* or *hurl object* attack; recharge when first bloodied) ✦ **Psychic**
Millen's attack deals an extra 1d8 psychic damage.
Vision of the Future (immediate interrupt, when hit by an attack; encounter)
Millen shifts 2 squares.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +9
Str 10 (+1) **Dex** 12 (+2) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 17 (+4) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Equipment quarterstaff, robes, belt pouch

Features of the Area

Illumination: The interior of the trading post is kept lit at all times by a variety of lanterns, candles, and a fire in the hearth. It is brightly lit throughout.

Ground: The ground is little more than a dirt floor covered in a layer of dry straw. An errant torch or broken lantern could set the floor, and the rest of the trading post, on fire.

Second Floor: A single set of stairs leads to a second floor, where a number of pallets are kept for travelers who need to stay overnight. The second floor is two squares up from the ground floor.

4 Dwarf Caravan Guards (G)	Level 1 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf	XP 100

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision
HP 32; **Bloodied** 16
AC 17; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 13, **Will** 12
Speed 5

⊕ **Warhammer** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 1d10+3 damage

⸸ **Shield Bash** (opportunity action, when an enemy makes an attack against the dwarf's *focused guard* power; at-will)
+6 vs. Fort; 1d6+3 damage, and the target takes a -3 penalty to the triggering attack.

⸸ **Skullcracker** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
+8 vs. AC; 2d10+3 damage. *Miss*: Half damage.

Focused Guard (free action 1/round; at-will)
Targets one adjacent ally. Until the end of the encounter or until the dwarf caravan guard uses this power again, if the target starts its turn adjacent to the dwarf caravan guard the target gains 4 temporary hit points.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Str 13 (+1) **Dex** 13 (+1) **Wis** 12 (+1)
Con 16 (+3) **Int** 9 (-1) **Cha** 8 (-1)
Equipment warhammer, scale armor, buckler

Dwarf Caravan Master (D)	Level 2 Skirmisher (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf	XP 125

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +2; low-light vision
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 16; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12
Speed 5

⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d12+3 damage (crit: 1d12 + 15 damage).

⸸ **Mobile Strike** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The dwarf caravan master can shift 1 square both before and after making this attack; +7 vs. AC; 1d12+3 damage (crit: 1d12 + 15 damage).

⸸ **Leaping Fury** (standard action; recharge when first bloodied) ✦ **Weapon**
The dwarf caravan master jumps up to his speed before making this attack, and this jump does not provoke opportunity attacks; +7 vs. AC; 2d12+2 damage.

Caravan Driver (move; at-will)
Each dwarf ally within 5 squares can shift 2 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Dwarven
Skills Insight +7
Str 17 (+4) **Dex** 11 (+1) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 14 (+3) **Int** 13 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+2)
Equipment greataxe, scale armor

Into the Boneyard

Encounter Level 4 (900 XP)

Setup

This encounter takes place if the characters are enticed into trying to investigate the boneyard. Several undead creatures reside here, and they lurk underground most of the time (hiding in shallow graves filled with dirt). These undead are mindless and brutish, and want only to extinguish any life that enters the boneyard.

2 boneyard zombies (B)
3 grave hunger zombies (G)
Shallow Graves

When the heroes enter the boneyard, read or paraphrase the following:

Scattered piles of earth and occasional small pits are all that distinguishes this pitiful graveyard from the surrounding terrain. The majority of the unmarked graves are down a slight slope, concentrated in a bowl-shaped depression in the valley.

Perception
DC 10 *The character notices that some of the bodies that lie stacked in open graves are occasionally moving of their own accord.*
DC 15 *The character notices that some of the mounds of earth are shifting, and that something might be lurking beneath.*

Tactics

The three grave hunger zombies begin in hiding, lurking in the mounds of earth and making Stealth checks to remain unnoticed. Once the characters are within the area, they emerge from hiding and try and drag characters into shallow graves. The boneyard zombies use *feed the hungry* to push the characters adjacent to grave hunger zombies, who then in turn use *drag to the grave* with the attack granted by the boneyard zombies.

Features of the Area

Illumination: During the daytime, there is little to obscure the sunlight, so the boneyard is well lit. At night, light from the trading post (and the moon, if present) illuminates the graveyard, casting the entire area in dim light.

Ground: The ground here is soft and covered in mounts of dirt. All squares filled by these dirt mounds count as difficult terrain.

Shallow Graves: A number of shallow graves leave holes in the ground throughout the boneyard. Each of these three shallow graves is marked on the map as an empty hole in the ground, and is 1 square deep.

2 Boneyard Zombie (B) **Level 3 Brute (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 150
Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +3
HP 57; **Bloodied** 28
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 13
Speed 6
⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d10+6 damage.
⸸ **Driving Slam** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. AC; 1d10+6 damage and the target is pushed 3 squares.
⸸ **Feed the Hungry** (standard; recharge when first bloodied)
+4 vs. Fort; 1d10+6 damage, and slide the target 3 squares. One ally adjacent to the target can use any at-will melee attack power against the target as a free action.
⸸ **Parting Shot** (when reduced to 0 hit points; encounter)
+6 vs. AC; 2d10+5 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Athletics +7
Str 13 (+2) **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 15 (+3)
Con 17 (+4) **Int** 4 (-2) **Cha** 8 (+0)

3 Grave Hunger Zombie (Z) **Level 3 Lurker**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 150
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +2
HP 35; **Bloodied** 17
AC 17; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13
Speed 6
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+8 vs. AC; 1d8+5 damage.
⸸ **Drag to the Grave** (standard; at-will)
+6 vs. Fort; 1d6+2 damage, and the grave hunger zombie shifts up to its speed and pulls the target the same number of squares. The target is grabbed, and as long as the target remains grabbed the grave hunger zombie gains a +4 bonus to AC and Reflex.
⸸ **Rend** (standard; at-will)
Grabbed targets only; +10 vs. AC; 2d8+5 damage, and the grab ends.
Cast Off (immediate reaction, when a grabbed creature escapes from the grave hunger zombie; at-will)
The grave hunger zombie shifts up to half its speed.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +8
Str 16 (+4) **Dex** 14 (+3) **Wis** 13 (+2)
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 4 (-2) **Cha** 6 (-1)

Shallow Grave **Level 3 Obstacle**
Hazard XP 150

The land is dotted with shallow pits, just deep enough to keep the rain from washing away the dirt covering fresh corpses inside.

Hazard: Shallow graves throughout the area quickly fill with a layer of foul-smelling dirt when anyone falls inside, making it hard to get out or make attacks.

Perception:
No check is necessary to notice the shallow graves.

Trigger:
A creature ends its movement or ends its turn adjacent to a shallow grave.

Attack

No Action **Melee**
Target: Triggering creature
Attack: +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is pulled 1 square into the shallow grave and restrained (save ends). The target does not get to save against being pulled over the precipice into the shallow grave.

Countermeasures

Athletics (DC 15): A creature restrained by a shallow grave can spend a move action to try and escape with an Athletics check. With a success, the creature is no longer restrained by the shallow grave.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG developer and designer at Wizards of the Coast. Originally from Chattanooga, TN, his credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include the *Eberron® Campaign Guide* and *Martial Power II*, and he is the lead developer for the 12 campaign setting books. Rodney is also the lead designer and developer of all of the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* Saga Edition books.

The realms of humans, dwarves, and elves are forever beset by a rising tide of evil. Demons claw at the planar firmament, eager to spread destruction across the cosmos. The dead stir within their tombs, called forth by wielders of shadow magic to slay the living and recruit them into their moldering legions. Orcs, trolls, and giants descend from mist-shrouded mountains to maraud and pillage. In the realms of the Feywild, hags and dark fey plot to corrupt and enslave the world.

The Keep on the Chaos Scar

By Mike Mearls
illustration by Craig J. Spearing
cartography by CrazyRed

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Here and there, standing on the narrow edge between civilization and the hungry dark, stand a few bastions of justice and law. Restwell Keep, so named by its current inhabitants, is one such edifice. Founded ages ago by a long forgotten lord, Restwell has kept a sentinel's post over the Chaos Scar for time out of mind. It has served as a hobgoblin warlord's fortress, a bandit gang's hideout, and now as an outpost of civilization in a monster-infested wilderness.

Background

Based on conversations a visitor might overhear at the Stumbling Giant, the residents of Restwell Keep rank arguing about the keep's history right behind gossip and ahead of the weather when it comes to topics of conversation. Everyone agrees on the basic gist of its origin and most notable inhabitants, but those agreements serve as little more than a common battleground for long debates on the veracity of a legion of rumors and legends.

The long list of the keep's residents is a rambling collection of heroic crusaders against the Chaos Scar, would-be dictators eager to carve a fiefdom out of the wilderness, and monsters seeking a defensible lair (including, for a time, the blue dragon Fafnar). The keep has stood empty for years at a time, claimed by wild animals, weeds, and little else. While the world around the keep shifts and changes, its walls abide.

Origin

The keep's first known inhabitant was a hobgoblin king known as Grim Eye for the few carvings of his scowling, angry visage found here and there in bas relief carvings above some doorways in the keep. His true name and the stories of his deeds are lost to antiquity. Yet, the keep's craftsmanship is obviously of dwarf manufacture. Most folk believe that Grim Eye enslaved the dwarves, but a few believe that free dwarves originally built and used the keep.

That fact—that dwarves built Restwell Keep—is now unquestioned. No other race could build a stone edifice that could last as long. Aside from wooden structures inside the keep, nearly every stone structure remains from the original construction. The dwarves' talent for stonework is also plainly evident in the secret doors found in some chambers. Detectable only by an expert dungeon explorer, secret chambers and passageways may exist beneath the keep that have yet to be uncovered.

Hidden Treasures

The keep's other notable, past resident lends an added layer of intrigue to such rumors of hidden chambers. The famed dwarf bandit Greysen Ramthane was a scourge of Nerath's borders for many long years. He and his coterie of thieves looted untold wealth from the empire. Eventually, Nerath dispatched a small army that tracked Greysen to the keep. After an extended siege, the soldiers stormed the keep and slew the bandits to a man. But what happened next became the source of countless rumors and legends. The task force's commanding officer, a half-orc named Bertak, claimed to find only a tiny portion of Greysen's stolen wealth within the keep. Stories claiming that Bertak and his cronies pocketed much of the treasure persist to this day, but others believe that Greysen's wealth is still hidden somewhere in the keep, protected by traps and mechanical guardians.

Recent Events

For several years, Restwell Keep served as the base of operations for a band of evil adventurers known as the Six Blades of Fortune. While the Blades fought monsters in the Chaos Scar, they also preyed on other, weaker adventuring bands, and even raided a few caravans. As they were content to keep their depredations far from their base of operations, in time the keep became a small outpost of civilization. Wanderers, refugees, and other folk in search of a safe harbor settled within the keep.

The Blades saw a benefit in the growing community within their walls. They taxes they collected paid the mercenaries who guarded the keep, and within five years, a small village stabilized within its walls and became a center for adventurers heading to the Chaos Scar. Despite the Blades' nature, they believed the safe harbor and profit offered by the keep was worth preserving.

In time, though, the Blades' criminal ways caught up with them. After stealing a holy icon of Erathis, they were tracked to the keep and defeated by Lord Peridin Drysdale, a human paladin of Erathis. Lord Drysdale and his followers slew four of the Blades and drove off the remaining two survivors. While he had planned to leave the keep and its inhabitants to their own devices, he saw that doing so would leave the inhabitants vulnerable without the Blades' protection. Assessing the threat posed by the Chaos Scar, he decided to remain in the keep as its new ruler. The guards and administrators who ran the village under the Blades' rule are still in place, and Drysdale plans to organize expeditions into the Scar to defeat the evil that dwells there.

While Drysdale's battle with the Blades never involved the common folk or even the bulk of the mercenary guards, the transition to his rule has caused some friction. The Blades were content to give the folk of Restwell Keep free reign of the place, as long as they kept out of the Blades' business. Drysdale's approach, while far from tyrannical, is more involved. He plans to turn the keep into a bastion of Erathis, much to the disgust of the freebooters, adventurers, and merchants who populate the place. They find his morality tiresome and his intent on meddling in the Chaos Scar alarming. He has irked those of the keep's many inhabitants who pay little mind to religion. Those who are of a religious mindset tend to favor Avandra, whose love of freedom stands in stark contrast to Drysdale's push for order and civilization.

Locations

Restwell Keep consists of an outer wall with an interior bisected into northern and southern ends by an inner wall, called the inner bailey and outer bailey respectively. The inner bailey is home to Lord Drysdale and his coterie of soldiers and advisors. He dwells within a small fortress, the keep's final line of defense, nestled against the northern wall. A large, open area between the fortress and the interior wall hosts a parade ground and stables for Drysdale's cavalry.

The outer bailey is home to the bulk of the keep's civilian residents, most of whom settled here during the rule of the Six Blades of Fortune. Crowded with small buildings, this area hosts an inn, a tavern, a bank, and other businesses, along with private apartments for long-term visitors to the keep. A small marketplace serves the merchants and farmers who visit the keep to sell their wares, though the ever-present threat of monsters from the Chaos Scar (and the presence of the Crossroads black market business) prevents Restwell from becoming a thriving hub of commerce. Still, the locals make enough profit from adventurers and the treasures they recover from the Scar to maintain a healthy living. The folk of the keep are by no means wealthy, but neither are they destitute.

1. Main Gate

Two 30-foot-tall towers flank the 20-foot-tall gatehouse that watches over the keep's entrance. A drawbridge, usually raised, spans the 40-foot-deep crevasse that surrounds the keep and leads into the gatehouse and the keep beyond.

A host of daunting obstacles greets anything that attempts to storm the gate. Guards armed with bows and crossbows watch the entrance from the towers above, a portcullis provides an additional barrier against intruders, and arrow slits in the gatehouse allow the guards to fire at creatures that make it past the drawbridge.

Visitors to the keep must first provide names, professions, and business in the keep to the guards. Only after hearing satisfactory answers do the guards lower the drawbridge. Security is a matter of life and death here. Flippant responses draw stony silence and a tightly shut drawbridge.

Those adventurers granted access to the keep are escorted by guards to the entry yard beyond the gatehouse. Fallek, the corporal of the watch, and Syradon, a scribe, meet them there along with a contingent of four guards. Visitors must escort their horses to the stables, while all weapons other than daggers must be turned over to Fallek for safe keeping.

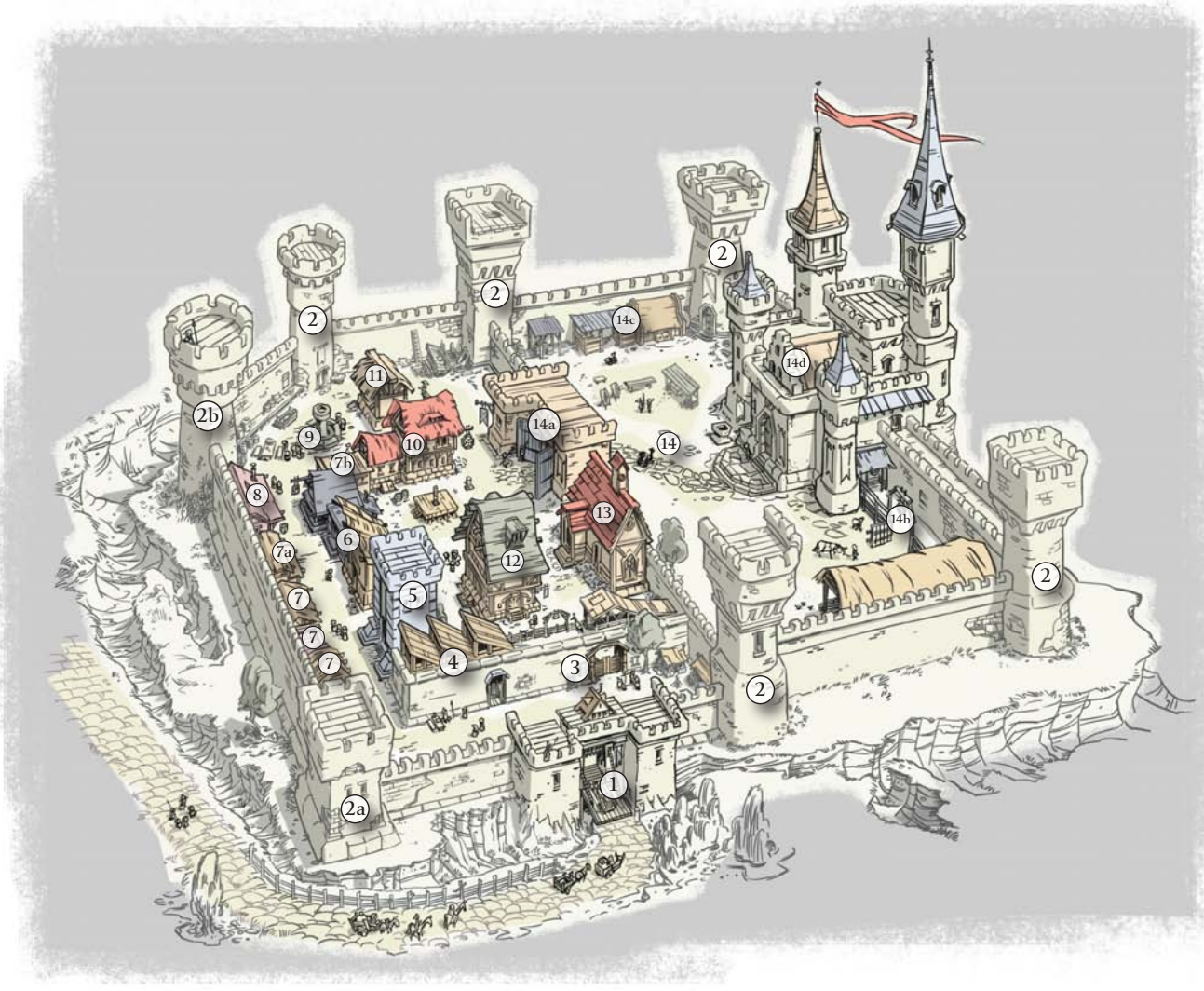
Fallek: The corporal of the guard is a male human warrior clad in plate mail, shield, sword, and dagger. His black, long hair is turning gray, and a scar runs across his right cheek. Over 40 years old, he has seen a number of battles and considers his post here something of a retirement. Grouchy and pushy, he'd rather be sitting and relaxing than dealing with visitors, but he has a soft spot for a pretty face or a tough, battle-scarred veteran. If he takes a liking to a newcomer, he gives them directions around the keep and might even take a particularly lovely visitor for a tour. Otherwise, he tries to get visitors out of his hair as quickly as possible.

Syradon: This male human wears typical workman's clothes and carries a battered leather book he uses to record visitors' names and any weapons left with Fallek. He wears a holy symbol of Ioun on a silver chain, but usually conceals it beneath his shirt. At a young age, he received a strange blessing from Ioun. He has perfect recall of everything he sees and hears, but will lose this gift if he ever speaks a word. Instead, he commits the history of Restwell Keep, as he witnesses it, to his book.

Syradon loves to hear stories of distant places. His quiet, unassuming nature causes other folk to underestimate him, and he keeps his gift of memory a secret. Strangers to the keep tend to think of him as deaf and dumb, and he has overheard many interesting stories not meant for his ears.

2. Towers

In addition to the towers that flank the gatehouse, seven others fortify the keep's walls. Four towers connected to the inner bailey are manned by warriors who serve Lord Drysdale, while the rest are staffed with the mercenary warriors of the outer bailey's watch. Each tower is 30 feet tall, crowned by battlements, and equipped with a ballista and a light catapult. Ten warriors, whether drawn from the watch or the guard of the inner bailey, live in barracks on the third floor. The first and second floors have chambers for the storage of food, water, arrows, and other supplies. A few of the towers also house officers of the watch and guard, as noted in their descriptions below.



2a. Bailiff's Tower

Perched at the keep's southeast corner, this tower replaces the typical storage chambers found on the first two floors with personal space for the bailiff, Kendon, and the scribe Syradon (see area 1). Offices for both can be found on the first floor, and their private apartments are on the second floor.

Kendon Longstrider: A veteran warrior who once served the Blades, Kendon is in charge of the outer bailey. He commands the guard, serves as a mediator between Lord Drysdale and the folk of the outer bailey, and collects taxes from adventurers and merchants. Nearly 60 years old, he keeps his gray hair cut short and his long moustache carefully waxed and trimmed.

Kendon is genuinely concerned by Lord Drysdale's rule. While he acknowledges the paladin's good intentions, he preferred the rule of the Blades. True, the Blades were criminals, but they left the people of the keep alone and avoided arousing the ire of the Chaos Scar's monsters. Rumors abound that all folk in the keep must soon convert to the worship of Erathis, that Drysdale plans to press everyone into an army he plans to march into the Scar, and that the keep will soon become little more than a military base for Drysdale's crusade.

While these rumors are untrue, Drysdale's aloof nature and Benwick's machinations (see area 7b) keep such stories alive. Kendon has also fallen under Benwick's sway. At the priest's urging, he has made contact with the surviving Blades. They are eager to avenge themselves against Lord Drysdale, and if the situation becomes dire enough, Kendon might betray the keep's lord.

2B. Captain's Tower

The second floor of this tower serves as the private chambers of the captain of the watch, the dwarf Gorn Hammerfall. Gorn serves as the bailiff's second-in-command.

Gorn Hammerfall: Gorn was elevated to the captain's post for his skill in siegecraft and engineering. He is responsible for maintaining the catapults and ballistae that protect the keep. In his free time, he works to restore the keep's original stonework and fortify its already formidable defenses.

Gorn has recently come into some money, although almost no one is aware of where or how. He wears a jeweled ring and loves to gamble at the Stumbling Giant (area 11). Rumors abound that, with his skill at stonework, he found a long-forgotten secret chamber filled with the treasures of Greysen Ramthane. The truth is far worse. Gorn is Ramthane's last, living heir. He came to the keep long ago to find the hidden treasures and only recently unearthed a trap-filled cache directly beneath his tower. He recovered a small amount of the treasure, but several traps and mechanical guardians—and even more treasure—remain untouched.

Unfortunately, Gorn chose to disclose his discovery only to the priest Benwick. Gorn worried that natives to the keep and anyone close to Lord Drysdale would insist on a share of the treasure. Benwick, as an outsider who intends to stay for but a short while longer, could be more easily bought off. Once he leaves, Gorn believes his secret will be safe. Unfortunately, Benwick insisted on a detailed tour of the keep's defenses as part of the agreement to keep his silence, which the dwarf actually found flattering. As a result, Benwick has learned much that could prove useful should the followers of Zehir he works for need to besiege Restwell Keep at a future date.

The treasure horde beneath the tower is defended by traps and homunculi, and totals 1,000 gp in coins and gems. Gorn has recovered 200 gp worth of treasure. When the time is right, Gorn and Benwick plan to delve into the place to seize the rest. If Benwick can manage it, he plans to kill the dwarf, take the treasure for himself, and conceal what he has learned of the keep's defenses. Gorn's secrecy has worked against him once more, as nobody suspects the two are linked as anything more than casual acquaintances.

Statistics for Keep Residents

Very few of the Keep's residents are likely to pose a threat to the characters. That said, if the characters do start a fight inside the keep, it's likely to be with Benwick or his acolytes, and will shortly thereafter be likely to include the keep's guards.

Use the snaketongue celebrant (*Monster Manual*, page 273) for Benwick, but drop Benwick's level to 8. This will reduce his attack and defense numbers by 3 each, and all his damage by 1.

Use the snaketongue warriors (*Monster Manual*, page 272) for Benwick's acolytes.

Use the human guards (*Monster Manual*, page 162) for the typical town guard.

3. Stables

Stables are available here for the characters to keep their horses, mules, and other mounts. Space on the roof is set aside for the occasional flying mount. The stables cost 2 sp per day per mount. A staff of six, all human, takes care of the mounts.

4. Warehouse

Merchants and travelers with wagons filled with goods keep their wares here while they remain in the keep. Fallek (area 1) has the key to the large, iron padlock used to secure the warehouse's entrance.

5. Smithy

This 20-foot-tall tower doubles as an interior redoubt, as the battlements on its roof allow archers to fire down upon intruders that manage to breach the outer bailey. The first floor is a smithy. While the smith, Bergen, typically crafts horseshoes and other goods, he is also a skilled weapon- and armorsmith. He and his family dwell in quarters on the second floor.

Bergen: This slender, slight male human looks more like a scholar than a smith. A devotee of Moradin, he relies on his knowledge of metals rather than brute strength. He particularly loves a challenge, and he has a great knowledge of dwarven rituals and lore. If given enough residuum, he can make any magical weapon or armor of up to level 10, subject to the DM's permission.

6. Provisioner and Trader

These two buildings serve as the center of trade within the outer bailey. The eastern building houses the provisioner Grelda, an elderly human woman who deals in herbs, food, and other perishable goods. She does much of her business with the few farmers and homesteaders who live near the keep.

The western half is given over to the trader, Bosco Heldam. Bosco is an overweight human who is eager to expand his business in the area. He deals almost exclusively with adventurers, and can offer almost any mundane good of up to 100 gp at a 10% markup.

Bosco and Grelda have something of a rivalry. Grelda has lived in the keep her entire life, and her shop has passed from one generation to the next. Bosco is a newcomer, an opportunist hoping to make a killing selling gear to adventurers who venture into the Chaos Scar. Their shops' proximity makes shouting matches and arguments between the two a daily occurrence, leaving their befuddled customers caught in the middle. Grelda has begun to import adventuring gear to muscle in on Bosco's business, and she offers her goods without his markup. For his part, Bosco has started speaking with Millen Silvereye at the Crossroads about a possible business arrangement that might allow Bosco to act as the tiefling's agent and partner in Restwell Keep.

7. Private Apartments

A number of buildings within the outer bailey serve as private apartments. Adventurers, travelers, and merchants that visit the keep can rent an apartment at a rate of 10 gp per week. Most of the apartments consist of a bedroom, a sitting room, and a storage area, but a pair of larger ones have two stories, complete kitchens, and two additional bedrooms. Both of the larger apartments are occupied, while the rest are currently empty.

7a. Jewel Merchant's Apartment

The jewel merchant Quint Spiregleam dwells here. The young gnome is eager to buy up jewels and art objects recovered by adventurers and sell them to collectors in the larger towns to the south. He aggressively approaches adventurers new to the keep in hopes of buying such items from them. He can be a handy source of adventures, as he regularly sends messages to and from the civilized lands. He might seek out adventurers to find traces of a missing caravan, commission the search for a specific type of gem or item, and so forth.

7b. Traveling Priest

The itinerant priest Benwick, along with his two acolytes, dwells here. Benwick has hosted many of the important people of the outer bailey here, serving fine food and drink while discussing matters of Restwell Keep and the Chaos Scar. He is charming, with a moon face, twinkling eyes, and round belly that cast him as a mirthful friar. He plays up this act with perfect charm, using humor and self-deprecation to win his way into the trust of the outer bailey's residents. The folk of the keep believe that he is a priest of Sehanine dedicated to wandering the land in search of new experiences. In truth, he is an adept of Zehir who seeks to overthrow the keep and claim it as a fortress for the snake cult.

Benwick: The evil priest represents perhaps the gravest, most immediate threat to the keep's security. He plans to slowly convert the folk of the outer bailey to the worship of Zehir, primarily by playing on their anger toward Lord Drysdale. The most ardent among them, those whose anger and hatred show the most promise, will be inducted into the inner cult. When the time comes, the rest will be either enslaved or slain.

Benwick is utterly charming. He takes great pains to maintain his cover, and if the party is alert or otherwise suspicious, he gives them a wide berth. If they appear to pose a significant threat to his efforts, he might then try to ally with them on an expedition to the Chaos Scar. There, he would attempt to betray and slay them.

Benwick's long-term plans are simple. A growing contingent of lizardfolk dedicated to Zehir gather near the keep. He plans on remaining here for another few months, sowing discord and finding converts to his cause. When the time is right, he will return, rally the converts, and strike in the dead of the night as the lizardfolk launch their attack. With any luck, he can seize the keep and convert it to a bastion of Zehir in one blood-soaked night.

With this bastion in hand, Benwick plans to slowly expand his influence outward, gathering recruits from the Chaos Scar and setting his sights on nearby settlements. With enough territory under his control, he can found a kingdom dedicated to Zehir where the yuan-ti and their allies can flourish.

8. Loan Bank

The loan bank is an important part of the keep's nascent economy. The banker, Ferdinand Ronnik, is a retired human adventurer who decided to pursue his fortune by taking an economic, rather than physical, risk. He can loan up to 200 gp at a time, with a 10% interest rate per week. Any loan requires collateral worth at least the full value of the loan.

Ferdinand Ronnik: An ex-thief who made a small fortune by looting a temple to Zehir, Ferdinand is short, slim, and wiry. He keeps a neatly trimmed goatee and has black hair. Benwick knows of Ferdinand's robbery and hopes to avenge the loss by either murdering Ferdinand or framing him for some crime against the keep. His current plan is to stoke unrest in the keep by planting letters to an unnamed, evil power in the Chaos Scar, along with maps of the keep's defenses, on Ferdinand shortly before alerting

Kendon of the "plot" to destroy the keep. With Ferdinand out of the way, Benwick can then sponsor one of his minions to take the banker's place, giving him another way to bring the keep under his thumb.

9. Fountain Square

A large fountain stands in the middle of this cobblestone square. During holidays and at harvest time, farmers and tradesmen from throughout the region gather here to sell their wares. Merchants from distant lands also set up shop here while they dwell within the keep, offering goods from across the region. The square is also a popular meeting place for adventurers, and many gather here to swap tales of the Chaos Scar, sell magic items, or seek out companions for expeditions.

The fountain is one of the most important landmarks in the keep. It has never run dry, and as far as anyone can tell, it is a magical source of unlimited water.

10. Travelers Inn

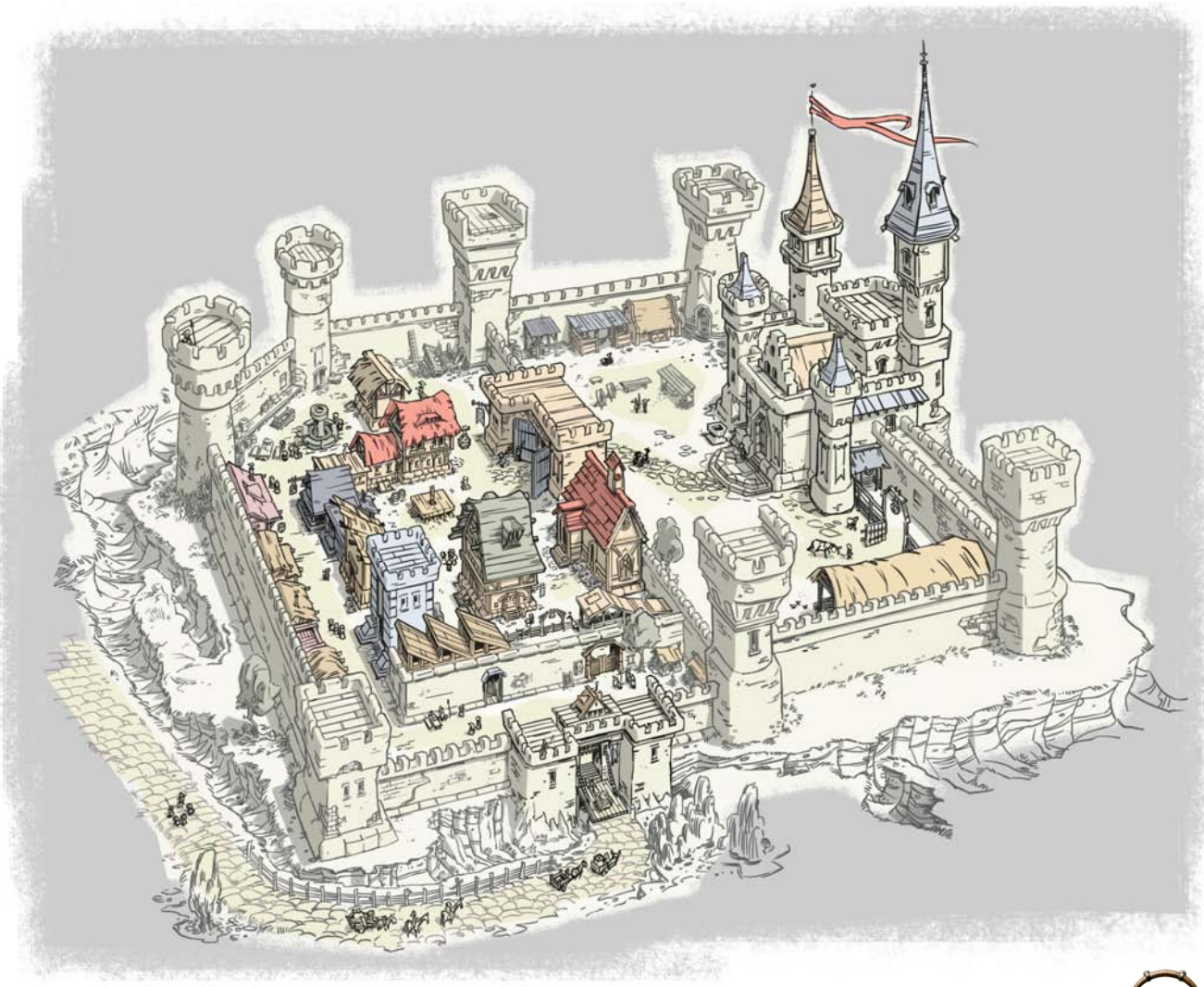
This long, low structure has five small, private rooms for rent and a large common room that can fit up to a dozen guests. A private room sleeps four and costs 1 gp per night, while a night in the common room costs 1 sp.

Nerrin Silverhand: The innkeeper, a human named Nerrin Silverhand, is cheap, greedy, and easily angered. The beds are old, broken down, and shoddy, while the blankets are full of holes. He has a bad reputation for allowing the fires in the inn to die down before midnight, leaving guests to resort to their own gear to remain warm. He guards the stock of firewood like a snarling dragon, but will gladly add a log to the fire if paid a few silver.

11. The Stumbling Giant

In contrast to the cheap, crude accommodations at the Travelers Inn, the Stumbling Giant is the social center of the outer bailey. Unfortunately, it is also a sign of the growing rift within the keep. Under direct orders of Lord Drysdale, the warriors of the inner bailey are not allowed to enter the Stumbling Giant for fear that they may overindulge in alcohol and embarrass themselves. Here, in the social heart of the keep, their absence speaks volumes.

Most folk of the outer bailey can be found here at least once a week, gathered over mugs of Mother Aran's Stout and swapping tales, spreading gossip, and arguing about the topic of the day. A huge fire-



place heats the common room, while a few booths offer space for private discussions.

Mother Aran: Following in the footsteps of her parents and their parents before her, Mother Aran runs a tight ship at the Stumbling Giant. Her secret family recipes for both food and drink have kept residents and visitors to the keep well fed for many years. Generous and friendly, she sees herself as a grandmother to all who come into her tavern.

Mother Aran serves to keep the folk of the keep unified, despite their differences. She sees no evil intent in Lord Drysdale's actions and is one of his biggest supporters in the outer bailey. If anything happened to her, the keep would be thrown into chaos and suspicion.

12. Saruun Guildhouse

Hailing from the distant Seven-Pillared Hall, a settlement founded amid the dungeons of Thunderspire in the Nentir Vale, the mages of Saruun are a secretive order of wizards that combines arcane knowledge with trade and business acumen. The mages are renowned for seeking trade with creatures of distant or dangerous realms. None can guess at their ultimate goals, but their trade posts deal in rare, exotic, and profitable goods.

The guildhouse is a two-story building. The lower floor features offices for the master of the guildhouse, a mage named Citirian, and his two assistants. Four human mercenaries serve as guards, while a large, brass construct called a bronze warder stands guard outside the guildhouse. At night, the warder walks a silent path around the place.

The second floor has quarters for the mages, the mercenaries, and a few spare rooms for visitors to the guildhouse.

The Saruun mages have a sinister reputation in town, but thus far they have yet to engage in any actions remotely damaging to the keep. They pay a hefty tax to Lord Drysdale, and at times have supplied him with magical items useful for defending the keep. Still, the mages keep to themselves. Drysdale's detractors point to their presence in the outer bailey as another sign that the paladin cares only for his own business. After all, if he likes the mages so much, he could take them and their mysterious affairs into the inner bailey.

Citirian: This wizard wears a silver mask and long, sky blue robes. He speaks in a tone barely louder than a whisper, while his similarly clad assistants have never been known to speak.

If Citirian hears news of treasures brought out of the Chaos Scar by adventurers, he dispatches one of his assistants with a note inviting the adventurers to dinner at the guildhouse. He lavishes his guests with excellent food and at the end of the meal, makes an offer to buy whatever item or object the explorers found. These offers are usually 10% above the item's market price, but sometimes he offers far, far more than the baseline price.

At other times, Citirian uses a similar method to commission expeditions to specific areas of the Scar. Such commissions are seen as easy money, as the mage usually asks only for samples of soil, plants, and other mundane features from the Scar.

Citirian's true secret is far less sinister than the folk of the keep suspect. In truth, a rotating series of mages take on the role of Citirian, depending upon the needs of their research. The mages have taken a keen interest in the Scar and wish to study it. They are especially interested in Chaos Shards—fragments of the fractured meteor that purportedly have a myriad of powers and effects. Thus, they send adventurers forth to return with samples of beasts, earth, water, shards, and so on. A teleportation circle hidden in the cellars of the guildhouse allows for quick transportation to and from the order's headquarters in the Seven-Pillared Hall.

13. Chapel of Avandra

For many years, the chapel to Avandra was the spiritual center of the keep. Before Lord Drysdale's arrival, and even before the Blades claimed this place, the folk of the keep paid respect to the goddess of freedom and adventure. Many of the people who settled in the keep were outcasts, wanderers, and refugees. They saw this place as a safe harbor in a chaotic world.

That spirit of independence and adventure still thrives here, though Lord Drysdale's more regimented, orderly methods grate against the inhabitants of the outer bailey. The high priestess of Avandra, the half-elf Chendera, is one of Drysdale's loudest critics.

The chapel consists of a long stone building. Its interior consists of a single open chamber. A statue of Avandra, in her halfling form, stands at the far end of the structure. Most of the time, adventurers and other folk come here to offer sacrifices to Avandra and beseech her for good luck.

During holy days, most notably the last day of the year, the chapel becomes the center of activity in the outer bailey. Games of chance, most notably dice, take place in the chapel. Those who seek to curry Avandra's favor for the year gamble away 10% of their profits from the past year, sharing their good fortune in hopes of enticing more of it to come to them. The less fortunate attend in hopes of gaining Avandra's attention and garnering better luck.

Chendera: Short for a half-elf, with striking, long black hair, Chendera sees to the outer bailey's spiritual health. She spends much time at the Stumbling Giant, and is usually found there or in the chapel. She sees Lord Drysdale as an intruder and conqueror who is no better than the Blades. She is the one responsible for spreading rumors of forced conversions to the worship of Erathis. She and the others faithful of Avandra have dubbed Drysdale and his followers "empire builders," more intent on their unfeasible crusades than in managing the day-to-day needs of the keep.

While Chendera has a good heart, at the root of her discontent is her fear of losing control of the keep. She worked long and hard to mold the keep into its current form, and she would be crushed if it became an armed camp of Erathis worshipers. She responds to Drysdale with anger and discontent in hopes of convincing him to keep his attentions focused on the inner bailey.

Unfortunately for the keep, Chendera has fallen in with Benwick. The priest provides a sympathetic ear, and his advice to her has only deepened the rift between the inner and outer bailey. He hopes to use her as a driving force to sunder the keep's social order.

14. The Inner Bailey

The inner bailey is the seat of Lord Drysdale's power. It is divided into several areas, described below.

14a. Inner Gatehouse

The inner gatehouse is much like a miniature fortress perched in the middle of the keep. Should invaders breach the outer bailey, the inner gatehouse serves as another line of defense. It consists of an outer, southern wall that is 15 feet tall. The northern wall rises to 30 feet in height. This arrangement allows archers perched along both the northern and southern walls to fire upon enemies that enter the outer bailey.

A passage connecting the inner and outer baileys runs through the middle of the gatehouse. Two heavy doors, one on each end, are kept closed most of the time. It slopes steeply upward, while arrow slits along the passage allow the defenders to take a heavy toll on an attacking force.

The first floor of the gatehouse is an armory, while the second floor consists of barracks.

Garrick Blackoak: The sergeant of the guard, Garrick is a tough veteran of many battles against evil. He is absolutely loyal to Lord Drysdale. His temper, however, has proven his undoing. In the early days of Drysdale's rule, Garrick and his men frequented the Stumbling Giant. With his quick temper, Garrick touched off several brawls after overhearing insults against Lord Drysdale and his men. Since then, Garrick has suffered a miserable reputation among the people of the keep, and Drysdale's men are rarely allowed free access to the outer bailey as a result.

Garrick usually questions those who seek entrance to the inner bailey. Rude and easily angered, he rarely allows quick or direct access. At best, Garrick might dispatch a messenger to Lord Drysdale to set up a meeting at a later date.

14b. Inner Courtyard

This large, grassy field serves as a parade ground for Drysdale's forces. His men train here during the day, working through weapon and formation drills to the tune of drummers and pipers.

14c. Stables

Lord Drysdale plans on building up a formidable cavalry force. He has built stables in the western side of the inner courtyard, though they are only about half filled at this time.

14d. Fortress

This heavily fortified structure is the final line of defense for the keep. Its towers reach 60 feet in height, while the main door to this place is crafted of solid iron. The first floor consists of a great hall where Lord Drysdale hosts meetings and feasts, along with kitchens and living quarters for servants.

The second floor has a number of private quarters, including several spare chambers for visitors.

The third floor hosts Lord Drysdale's private quarters, along with the chambers of his second in command, the captain of the guard Elessan, and a small temple to Erathis.

The outer towers attached to the fortress, while impressive from a distance, serve a basic, defensive function. The guards assigned to the fortress have quarters there.

A grand cellar beneath the fortress holds emergency reserves of food, weapons, and other supplies. If necessary, the keep can hold out for three months without outside support.

Lord Drysdale: The ruler of the keep, Lord Drysdale is a nearly 50-year-old human paladin of Erathis. His iron gray hair and tanned, weathered skin point to many long years spent wandering the wilds in search of evil foes to defeat. In his old age, Drysdale has decided to settle down while continuing to do what good he can. He sees the keep as a seed that, with the right attention, can bloom into a gleaming bastion of civilization. He dreams of amassing enough warriors to draw settlers and merchants to the region. In time, he hopes to defeat the evil of the Chaos Scar and turn the entire region into a civilized realm.

Drysdale's key weakness lies in his long military experience. While an excellent warrior and a skilled tactician, he has little experience as a politician. The concerns and worries of the folk of the outer bailey strike him as mere complaints. If he could, he would remove them from the keep and relocate them to a safer land. He cannot understand why such folk would want to dwell in the shadow of the Chaos Scar.

Lord Drysdale keeps a keen eye out for promising adventurers. As part of his long-term strategy for reclaiming the region, he wants information on the Chaos Scar. Adventurers that defeat evil creatures within the Scar earn his respect. If such adventurers prove themselves over time, he eventually invites them into the fortress for a banquet. He asks many questions of his guests, carefully sizing them up before extending support to them. He can offer a place to stay in the fortress, command of some of his soldiers on missions, and information he has uncovered about the Chaos Scar to set them against increasingly powerful enemies.

Elessan: Drysdale's second in command is an elf cleric of Erathis. A kind and just man, Elessan provides a useful foil to Drysdale's militaristic nature. He understands the concerns of the folk of the outer bailey, and he sometimes moves among them disguised as a mercenary warrior. He distrusts the priest Benwick, but does not yet have any solid evidence of his intentions.

Elessan is deeply troubled by the growing rift between the residents of the inner and outer bailey, but thus far he has yet to convince Lord Drysdale of the threat it poses. He worries that Drysdale will act too late to address the problem. He sometimes contacts heroic adventurers via a messenger to arrange a meeting with them. He would love to set someone to spy upon Benwick, but he is worried that any open move against the priest would only further the tensions within the keep. Ideally, a band of adventurers could insinuate themselves into Benwick's favor to keep tabs on him.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Designer for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include *Player's Handbook® 3*, *Hammerfast™*, and *Primal Power™*.

Codex of Betrayal: Geryon, the Broken Beast

By Ari Marmell
illustration by Spikytiger

"Well do I know," spake the Rebellious One, "of the hatred you bear our weakling god. And well do I know of the power you call your own. Join with me and mine, for I would welcome such power and such hatred."

Long did Geryon gaze with many eyes upon his brother angel. "And we know, too, of your ambitions, but we share them not. Why, then, should our hatred of our lord inspire fealty to one such as you?" asked he.

"I can offer you power such as you have never known, a realm of possibilities undreamt of. You shall sit at my right hand, that none might gainsay you."

"This we have had," spake Geryon, "at the side of our lord, and its taste has soured. For it, as all joys, turns to ash in our mouth and smoke in our hands. What think you that you can offer to such as us?"

Then did Asmodeus offer broken Geryon a smile that would some day damn a million souls. "Only what our feeble master never could, Brother. I offer to make you whole."

– From Chapter 3, verse 3, of "A Chronicle of Bloodstained Heavens," from part two of the *Codex of Betrayal*.

Throughout the realms of creation, few devils boast a name as widely recognized as that of Geryon. Called the Wild Beast, the Trifold Duke, and—in the modern age—the Broken Beast, Geryon was once the ruler of Stygia, fifth layer of the Nine Hells. For a time, Geryon enjoyed all that Asmodeus promised him, and more.

That was, until the new uprising, when the dukes of the Nine Hells turned upon Asmodeus—all save Geryon himself. For his loyalty, Geryon was punished, stripped of rank and power, and exiled from the Pit.

Today, the Broken Beast is perhaps the worst sort of devil: unbound to the Nine Hells, without direction and with nothing to lose.

History

For ages uncounted, Geryon was one of the greatest angels of He Who Was, favored above nearly all others. Some have suggested that his betrayal at Asmodeus's hands was nothing but payment for the treachery that Geryon himself once committed.

Before the Uprising

In the ranks of the angelic hosts of He Who Was, only a scant few stood higher than Geryon. A being partly flesh and partly pure Astral light, he flew on gleaming wings through all creation on errands for the god whom he loved more than anything.

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No—more than *almost* anything.

For Geryon was one of a band of seven of the most powerful angels. They traveled together, fought together, worshiped together, and together shared a love that transcended the mortal definition of the word. For one another, these angels would have sacrificed all they were.

The *Codex of Betrayal* speaks of a great enemy they were one day dispatched to fight, but remains vague on the details—perhaps those details are among the pages that have been lost. The epoch was right for them to have faced a primordial, for it occurred near the Dawn War's end, but vague hints suggest something from the Far Realm, or else from before the primordials shaped reality out of the void.

Ultimately, it matters little what did the deed, only that the deed was done. The company of archangels fell in battle, wounded not merely to their flesh, but to the soul. Four of the seven were obliterated, beyond even divine aid. The three strongest—Geryon among them—survived long enough to return to their god.

He Who Was looked upon them in sorrow, for he knew he could not save them all. But in one moment of desperation—perhaps in grief, perhaps compassion—he recognized that he could draw on the essence of two to save one.

Thus did he patch the spirit of Geryon with splinters of the souls of the other angels. And for a while, though he grieved as no mortal could ever comprehend, Geryon was grateful to his god.

But over time, Geryon recognized that he was thinking thoughts and feeling emotions that were not his own. Bits of his fallen brethren were bound inside him, and the angel realized with a growing horror that he would never be free of them, that he would be reminded of his loss for eternity, would experience just enough of the others' personalities to feel his sorrow anew.

Geryon grew more bitter, more resentful of He Who Was. Whether the angel was angry that he had not been allowed to die with the others or that his god could not save his companions, even he could not say.

During the War

Geryon's growing hatred did not go unnoticed, and while it was not sufficient motivation for him to join in the initial rebellion against He Who Was, Asmodeus's promise to heal Geryon's essence was precisely the goad required. In the Battle for the Bridge of Storms, one of the first great clashes of the War of Rebellion, Geryon led the forces of He Who Was into an ambush and then turned on them. There he fought beside Asmodeus himself and became one of the rebellion's greatest generals.

The *Codex of Betrayal* maintains that when he learned of Geryon's betrayal, He Who Was wept tears enough to drown a mountain.

The *Codex* requires multiple pages just to list the battles and events in which Geryon was involved throughout the war. Often he stood at the forefront of Asmodeus's armies, but more frequently he traveled alone, serving his new lord as saboteur and assassin. Many angels of He Who Was fell to Geryon's blade in realms far from any battlefield. It was also during this time that the devil Alloces, sometimes called the Butcher of Nessus, came to serve under Geryon. (See "Codex of Betrayal: Alloces" in *Dragon* #373.)

In the Kingdom of the Damned

Having proven his loyalty, Geryon fully expected his promised payment, and Asmodeus delivered. Using his new divinity, the god of tyranny used the spiritual essence of the first souls damned to the Nine Hells to repair Geryon's soul. He could not entirely remove the lingering voices of the other two angels, but he further integrated them into Geryon's own psyche. Now, when he heard and felt them, it was as a mere twinge, a half-forgotten memory.

But the punishments of the Nine Hells are cruel, even for the devils themselves, and Geryon—like all the rebel angels—was physically warped by the realm of the damned. He would never be permitted to forget whence he'd come, for while Asmodeus could integrate the shards of the souls within him, the new deity could do nothing to change the new physical body Geryon was granted: a foul, bestial, thing with three torsos, each faintly resembling one of the three angels whose essence he shared.

Still, Geryon's gratitude was unending, and the power he wielded as one of the most ancient of angels—now devils—was of great benefit to Asmodeus. For centuries, Geryon continued to serve as the personal operative of the King of the Nine Hells. Throughout the depths he traveled, carrying Asmodeus's word or spying upon and sabotaging the efforts of other dukes. He traveled, too, to the mortal world, wreaking great havoc in the name of those who dared call upon the infernal powers. (It was on one of these sojourns to the mortal realm that he gained his infamous horn). When within Nessus, he stood beside Asmodeus as one of his greatest advisors.

In time, those evils Geryon once committed out of loyalty or anger were instead committed out of malice and cruelty.

The Duke of Ice

Few were willing to risk the wrath of one as cunning and mighty as Asmodeus, but Levistus did exactly that when he murdered Bensozia, Asmodeus's consort. The King of the Nine Hells was enraged, and he imprisoned Levistus in an iceberg and granted rulership of Stygia to Geryon.

Initially, Geryon resented the time he spent ruling his domain, pined for the relative freedom he had lost. Slowly, however, he came to enjoy his position, tormenting those beneath him and playing the games of politics that permeate the Nine Hells. During his long years ruling Stygia, Geryon did little to distinguish himself from the other dukes, but neither was his rule seriously threatened or troubled.

Upheaval, Betrayal, and Exile

Eventually, in the hopes of overthrowing him and recasting the Nine Hell's hierarchy more to their liking, the dukes rose up against Asmodeus, first in secret scheming, then open rebellion. Geryon, however, remained secretly loyal, feeding Asmodeus information on the conspirators' activities. On the day of the final battle, as the armies of the betrayers began to move, Geryon blew his great horn, signaling his forces to attack from within as Asmodeus's own troops converged from without. The result was slaughter, and Asmodeus laughingly punished his errant underlings, humiliating some and banishing others.

Then, for reasons that remain obscure to this day, Asmodeus exiled the only duke to remain loyal. From Geryon he stripped not only rulership of Stygia but also a substantial portion of Geryon's former might, and banished the stunned devil from the Nine Hells.

Into Endless Night

Wracked with despair and confusion, Geryon aimlessly wandered the reaches of the Astral Sea. Without purpose, without desire, he disappeared from mortal and immortal history alike, until many believed he had died or even returned to the Astral energies that birth the angels.

But Geryon did not die. Rather, after uncounted ages, the darkness in his spirit answered the call of a larger darkness, and he found himself within the depths of Tytherion, the Endless Night. Nor was he the only devil to find his way here, for something of that dominion calls to the infernal. In a wasteland vale dominated by neither Tiamat nor Zehir, but carefully watched by both, Geryon carved out a home among a motley population of other exiled devils. But while others maneuvered and jockeyed for position, either within their own ranks or in the eyes of the dominion's gods, Geryon only brooded in the depths of the cave he claimed as his own.

Geryon, D&D, and the Real World

Like so many of the game's greatest fiends, Geryon finds his roots in real-world myth and literature. Unlike others, Geryon actually comes from two completely separate sources.

Back in 1st Edition, Gary Gygax based Geryon on the demon that appears in Dante's *Inferno* to briefly carry Dante and Virgil. It is from this source that the duke's handsome human face and bestial body are drawn, and that was the look that Geryon maintained throughout 1E and his (extraordinarily scarce) 2nd Edition mentions.

Once he'd been banished from the Nine Hells, and his domain given to another, Geryon took on a very different form in 3rd Edition. He appeared in the *Tome of Magic* as a vestige—a creature of forgotten spirit. Here, he's described as three bodies joined into one. This description draws not on Dante but on Greek mythology—specifically the twelve labors of Heracles—in which Geryon was a giant with three torsos on one pair of legs. (In some of the myths, those three torsos together support only a single head. Try to picture *that* without your eyes crossing!)

While the 4th Edition *Manual of the Planes* mentions that Geryon dwelt in exile within the depths of Tytherion, it says nothing of his physical nature. As such, because it provides for interesting background and mechanics both, we've chosen to combine aspects of both prior variations for his current incarnation. Thus does Geryon enter the 4th Edition era as a creature both new and steeped in the traditions of the game—and of the game's classic inspirations.

The Broken Beast

Better indeed for the world if Geryon had remained a broken soul, a threat to no one. But alas, such was not to be.

In watching the squabbling of the other devils and the skirmishes between the darksworn of Zehir and Tiamat, Geryon felt his old love of cruelty and power surge through his pall of despair. Finally, it occurred to Geryon that unbound by the hierarchy of Hell, he might carve out his own domain, unfettered by the whims of Asmodeus or anyone else.

Determined not to draw the ire of Tytherion's gods, Geryon is not attempting to consolidate control over the dominion's outcast devils. Rather, he has begun making overtures—to Tiamat, to Zehir, to other planar powers—offering to serve for a time as agent and emissary, as he once did to Asmodeus. In this fashion, he hopes to gain access to other Astral domains, and especially the mortal world, where he can attempt to build new cults in his name. He has only just begun, but Geryon has nothing but time.

Time is exactly what he needs, not merely for his efforts at empire-building, but because a new idea has recently occurred to him: a reason for his exile. Even a creature as accustomed to the machinations of the Nine Hells needs time to understand the repercussions should his theory prove correct.

Geryon's Goals

Overtly, Geryon seeks to establish allies among the evil deities, allowing him to act in their name and, if necessary, draw upon their resources. Ultimately, he hopes to influence the mortal world to a greater degree than other devils, for he is not bound to the Nine Hells. With the growth of cults and pacts that bind him to mortal rulers, he can acquire power over populations of souls in a relatively short time. For the time being, Geryon usually appears in the service of either some greater power or of a mortal with whom he has entered into an infernal pact.

But quietly, Geryon pursues another goal as well, one based on answering the burning question of his existence: What could the King of Hell have had to gain by exiling his greatest ally?

Geryon has come to believe that Asmodeus wants him to do something—something he could not do as a Duke of Hell, something so unthinkable that even Asmodeus doesn't dare be associated with it even by proxy. If this is so, then he has not turned against his vassal, but instead expects Geryon to figure out on his own what is expected of him.

Geryon is determined to learn the nature of this task—though whether he will follow through on Asmodeus's wishes once he's figured it out, he has yet to decide. But even as he struggles to comprehend this new mission, a shiver of fear wriggles through his essence as he wonders...

What errand, what goal, could be so horrible that even the King of Hell dare not *speak* of it?

Three Heads Are Better...

To understand Geryon, it's vital to realize that, though he possesses three heads (and torsos), symbolizing pieces of three different angelic essences at his core, Geryon's mind is not divided. Unlike Demogorgon, whose heads represent separate personas, Geryon possesses a single psyche. The parts of that personality are split, allowing him to converse with himself. His leftmost torso is thoughtful and conniving; his center enraged; his rightmost almost manic and prone to frequent cackling. When conversing with others, Geryon speaks from whichever head most closely matches his current emotional state—but *all* are Geryon, without conflict and without the slightest delay between thought and action.

Geryon, the Broken Beast

First come the voices—whispering from within the endless dark, a muttered conversation punctuated by reptilian slithering. They appear together, three as one, and indeed the three *are* one. A trio of humanoid torsos, joined at the shoulders, emerge from an impossibly massive serpentine trunk. Three faces of noble mien gaze out from beards shaggy and tangled with neglect. Bestial arms dangle loosely below. The leftmost and rightmost torso each boast a single wing that curls outward, fanning the air in a slow, deliberate cadence.

The Horn of Geryon

During his reign over Stygia, Geryon's symbol of authority was his massive horn. Acquired during one of his quests on behalf of Asmodeus, this potent item was never away from Geryon's side. Since his banishment, the horn, like Geryon himself, has fallen dramatically in power, but it is still potent as both a weapon and symbol.

The horned beasts summoned by the *horn of Geryon*, humanoid in shape and cloven of hoof, are easily mistaken for minotaurs, but are actually a breed of otherwise extinct devils with no known relation to the earthly creatures they resemble.

Geryon in Combat

Although less powerful than he once was, Geryon is a terror in combat. He relishes the opportunity to beat and tear at living creatures with his claws, but though he appears brutish, he's a canny combatant. He delights in softening his foes from a distance before summoning a hoard of horned beasts and moving into melee range. Almost nothing makes him happier than seeing his foes cowering in terror—either genuine or inspired by his *fearsome gaze*.

But Geryon is also temperamental. Once bloodied, he becomes far more like the brute he resembles, often throwing tactics to the wind in exchange for the opportunity to break his enemies beneath his pounding fists.

Geryon, the Broken Beast **Level 30 Solo Controller**
Huge immortal humanoid (devil) XP 95,000

Initiative see *triple actions* **Senses** Perception +21; all-around vision, darkvision
HP 1,092; **Bloodied** 546; see also *brutish fury*
AC 44; **Fortitude** 43, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 42
Immune dominate; **Resist** 30 fire, 20 poison
Saving Throws +5
Speed 7, fly 5 (clumsy)
Action Points 2

Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +35 vs. AC; 3d8 + 10 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Grasping Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +35 vs. AC; 3d8 + 10 damage, and the target is grabbed. Geryon cannot make *grasping claw* attacks while it is grabbing a creature.

Slashing Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +35 vs. AC; 3d8 + 10 damage, and Geryon slides the target 3 squares.

Brutal Smash (standard; recharge ⚅)
Requires a grabbed enemy of Large size or smaller; reach 3; targets a creature not grabbed by Geryon; +34 vs. Fortitude; 4d10 + 9 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends both) and is knocked prone. The grabbed creature also takes 4d10 + 9 damage.

Tail Sweep (immediate reaction, when an enemy within reach hits or misses Geryon; at-will)
Reach 3; +35 vs. AC; 2d8 + 10 damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.

Fearsome Gaze (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Fear, Gaze, Psychic**
Close blast 5; targets enemies in burst; +34 vs. Will; 3d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target is pushed a number of squares equal to its speed + 2. The target then falls prone, and takes ongoing 15 psychic damage and is dazed (save ends both). *Miss:* Half damage, and Geryon pushes the target a number of squares equal to its speed.

Symbol of Pain (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
Area burst 3 within 20; targets enemies in burst; +34 vs. Will; 3d8 psychic damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends). With each failed saving throw, the ongoing damage increases by 5 (maximum 30). *Miss:* Half damage.

Brutish Fury
When bloodied, Geryon deals +5 damage with all attacks, but takes a -2 penalty to all defenses.

Triple Actions
Geryon does not roll initiative. He has set initiative counts of 35, 30, and 25, and he takes a full turn on each of those initiative counts. He cannot delay or ready actions.

Triple Brain
Each time Geryon becomes dazed or stunned, the effect automatically ends at the end of his next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Arcana +27, Bluff +29, Diplomacy +29, Intimidate +29, Religion +27
Str 32 (+26) **Dex** 21 (+20) **Wis** 22 (+21)
Con 25 (+22) **Int** 25 (+22) **Cha** 28 (+24)
Equipment *horn of Geryon*

Geryon Lore (Religion DC 28)

The character knows everything written under History, above, except for that information presented under "The Broken Beast" header.

Geryon Encounters

Geryon is normally encountered alone (or, at most, in the company of conjured horned beasts), either pursuing his own agenda or acting on behalf of a potential ally. On occasion, he works alongside other agents of whomever he currently serves. In these instances, he might stand with dragons or dragonspawn, if serving Tiamat; yuan-ti, if serving Zehir; or any variety of humanoids if fulfilling the terms of a bargain with mortals. On rare occasions, he's even found alongside other devils summoned by whatever mortal he's working with; in these instances, Geryon often "inadvertently" allows those devils to come to harm during combat.

Horn of Geryon **Level 30**

Carved from the horn of some monstrous beast and banded in iron, this great instrument requires both hands to lift—but conjures a massive ally.

Wondrous Item 3,125,000 gp

Power (Daily): Standard Action. You spend a healing surge and wind the horn to conjure a horned beast (see below for statistics) in an unoccupied square within 6 squares of you. The horned beast remains until it is killed or until the end of the encounter; the horned beast has no healing surges and cannot be healed. The creature does not take actions on its own, but you can spend a minor action to allow it to take a move, minor, or standard action (it cannot take more than one standard action or two move actions each turn).

Horned Beast **Level 30 Minion Brute**
Large immortal humanoid (devil)

Initiative as conjurer
Senses Perception +24; darkvision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion
AC 42; **Fortitude** 43, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 42
Speed 6

⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +33 vs. AC; 18 damage.

⸸ **Goring Charge** (standard; at-will])
The horned beast makes a charge attack; +34 vs. AC; 13 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares. The horned beast shifts 2 squares after the attack to remain adjacent to the target.

✧ **Deathly Inferno** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Close burst 3; +31 vs. Reflex; 13 fire damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Str 31 (+25) **Dex** 24 (+22) **Wis** 28 (+24)
Con 25 (+22) **Int** 8 (+14) **Cha** 13 (+16)
Equipment greataxe

About the Author

Ari Marmell was born in New York, moved to Houston when he was a year old, moved to Austin when he was 27, but has spent most of his life living in other worlds through a combination of writing and roleplaying games. He has been writing more or less constantly for the last dozen years, though he has only been paid for it the past five. He is the author of multiple roleplaying game supplements including work on Dungeons & Dragons. Ari lives in Austin with his wife George and two cats.

Creature Incarnations: Fomorians

By Andrew Schneider

illustration by Dave Allsop

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Daros felled the final cyclops guard and kicked open the door to the fomorian king's chambers. Prepared to confront a cornered monarch, he instead faced a force thrice those already fallen.

"Bravo, bravo!" the fomorian king applauded, as Daros was escorted into the chamber. "No others have uncovered the flaws in my palace defenses. In reward, I name you my new Chancellor of War." A well-dressed cyclops was dragged away, screaming. "Feast tonight! Tomorrow, we speak of the eladrin of Mithrendain."

Stark raving mad, fomorians also act as the civilizing force of the Feydark. What dim points of light exist in that benighted realm likely came from their initiative—and the work of their cyclops followers, who worship the fomorians as gods.

Twisted reflections of titans that forged the world, fomorians are driven mad by strange double visions. Their normal eye and evil eye constantly conflict, with one showing the world as it is, the other as it could be—entirely under their rule. Only when the two visions match is a fomorian satisfied, but they never do. Nevertheless, fomorians work tirelessly to bring the Feywild under their dominion. Though their dreams of conquest are often stymied by eladrin forces on the surface, fomorian forces delve deep, assaulting the deadly wilds of the Feydark and imposing their laws and decrees upon the creatures within it.

Fomorians and the Vistani

Due to a real or imagined kinship through their evil eyes, fomorians treat Vistani with a studied disinterest unknown to others outside their own race. Vistani caravans are permitted to travel and trade freely within fomorian realms. Though traveling with Vistani has its own risks, these caravans are a relatively comfortable means for adventurers to traverse the Feydark, provided they can negotiate safe passage.

Fomorian madness is founded on a loathing of all nonfomorians paired with the desire to rule over those they despise. Since they crave genuine authority, unlike many races of the Underdark, fomorians of the Feydark welcome adventurers—for as long as they remain useful or entertaining.

Fomorians might be wicked rulers of the Feydark, but fomorian kingdoms are oases of relative civilization in an otherwise dark and dangerous realm. Combined with their megalomaniacal madness, fomorians are the perfect monsters to inject a dose of political intrigue, military strategy, or horror into your Feywild campaign.

Fomorian Slavedriver

Fomorian slavedrivers manage networks of slave caravans as they deliver their cargo, which consists of the spoils of surface raids, to fomorian kingdoms throughout the Feydark.

Fomorian Slavedriver Tactics

The fomorian slavedriver prefers to fight from behind the cover of his allies. He provides incentive to attack those he considers most threatening to himself with a combination of *flaying strike* and *evil eye*.

Fomorian Slavedriver Lore

Arcana DC 18: Fomorian slavedrivers are cowards and bullies that drive allies mercilessly until they drop from exhaustion. Slavedrivers sign on for any task where they can punish underlings.

Fomorian Slavedriver **Level 14 Elite Brute (Leader)**
Huge fey humanoid (giant) XP 2,000
Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +8; truesight 6
HP 346; **Bloodied** 173
AC 27; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1
Scourge (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 3; +17 vs. AC; 2d12 + 7 damage.
Flaying Strike (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 3; +17 vs. AC; targets one or two creatures; 2d12 + 7 damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the start of the slavedriver's next turn.
Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at-will)
Ranged 10; targets 1 ally; the target deals 2d6 extra damage with next attack made before the end of its next turn but grants combat advantage until the end of the slavedriver's next turn.
Back, You Dogs (immediate reaction, when the fomorian slavedriver is marked; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +17 vs. AC; 2d12 + 7 damage, the slavedriver pushes the target 2 squares, and the slavedriver is no longer marked. *Effect:* The slavedriver slides each ally in the burst 2 squares.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven
Str 25 (+14) **Dex** 20 (+12) **Wis** 12 (+8)
Con 23 (+13) **Int** 15 (+9) **Cha** 16 (+10)
Equipment leather armor, scourge

Fomorian Astral Scourge

Fomorian astral scourges work incessantly to master the power of the Astral Sea. Each hopes to uncover the means to supplant or become a god. An astral scourge appears as a combination of fomorian and angel, flying on ephemeral angelic wings. It carries the severed wing of an angel of battle as a weapon and symbol of power. Enslaved angels often accompany astral scourges.

Fomorian Astral Scourge **Level 15 Elite Artillery**
Huge fey humanoid (giant) XP 2,400

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +6; truesight 6
HP 220; **Bloodied** 110
AC 25; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 28
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 8
Action Points 1

Wing Blade (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage.

Astral Wrath (standard; at-will) ✦ **Radiant**
Ranged 10; one or two targets; +20 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 6 radiant damage (2d12 + 6 while bloodied).

Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Radiant**
Ranged 10; +20 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 15 radiant damage, sheds bright light as a torch, and cannot benefit from cover or concealment (save ends all).

Angelfall (standard; requires the fomorian to be flying; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Force**
The astral scourge flies its speed and lands and makes the following attack: Close burst 2; +18 vs. Reflex, 3d6 + 5 force damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the astral scourge's next turn.

Light as a Feather
The astral scourge reduces its falling damage by 25 and lands on its feet.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven
Skills Acrobatics +18, Religion +17
Str 18 (+11) **Dex** 22 (+13) **Wis** 8 (+6)
Con 14 (+9) **Int** 20 (+12) **Cha** 25 (+14)

Fomorian Astral Scourge Tactics

The fomorian astral scourge prefers to circle directly above its enemies on the battlefield where a well-timed *angelfall* can have the most effect, otherwise singling out targets with *astral wrath* and *evil eye* until it is forced to the ground.

Fomorian Astral Scourge Lore

Arcana DC 18: Although others make sacrifices, pacts, and compromises in exchange for power, an astral scourge takes all it can from the astral sea and gives nothing in return. Other fomorians consider them either canny or foolish, depending on which angelic assassins are after them at the time.

Arcana DC 23: An astral scourge's wings are formed through a tenuous link to the Astral Sea. Inhabitants of that plane sometimes follow the link to the astral scourge's location, becoming slaves or scavengers in the astral scourge's wake.

Fomorian Outcast

When a fomorian breaks the local king's law or fails in a coup, it is banished and sentenced to years of hard labor. Those that escape or survive the prisons are unwelcome in the civilized realms of the Feydark.

Fomorian outcasts are dressed in scavenged tatters of fomorian finery. They wear their shackles as a vow of vengeance.

Fomorian Outcast **Level 15 Elite Lurker**
Huge fey humanoid (giant) XP 2,400

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +11; truesight 6
HP 222; **Bloodied** 111
AC 27; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

Punch (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +20 vs. AC; 3d6 + 5 damage.

Prison Chains (standard; usable only while the outcast does not have a creature grabbed; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 3; +20 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage, and the target is grabbed (and takes a -5 penalty to checks made to end the grab) and is pulled 2 squares into an unoccupied square adjacent to the outcast. The outcast can move the grabbed creature without making a Strength check. While the outcast has the target grabbed, any attack that hits the outcast also hits the grabbed creature.

Crack Shackles (standard; requires the outcast to have the creature grabbed; at-will)
Targets the grabbed creature; +20 vs. AC; 5d6 + 5 damage and the grab ends.

Evil Eye (minor 1/round; requires the outcast to have the creature grabbed; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +18 vs. Will; 2d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the outcast and any creature it is grabbing become invisible to the target until the end of the outcast's next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven
Skills Stealth +19, Thievery +19
Str 20 (+12) **Dex** 25 (+14) **Wis** 18 (+11)
Con 15 (+9) **Int** 12 (+8) **Cha** 20 (+12)

Fomorian Outcast Tactics

A fomorian outcast lurks near the edge of a battle, waiting for the right moment to pick off a lone combatant with *prison chains* and drag the foe away from its allies.

Fomorian Outcast Lore

Arcana DC 18: Outcasts survive on the outskirts of kingdoms they once aspired to rule. Some outcasts, fearful of being hunted, conceal their lairs behind traps and secret doors.

Fomorian Portal Lord

Fomorian portal lords delve shortcuts across time and space, creating and controlling temporary and permanent teleportation circles. Those that aren't forever lost between dimensions gain power and influence within fomorian kingdoms.

Portal lords wear finery embroidered with arcane symbols; the more powerful the portal lord, the greater the number of symbols.

Fomorian Portal Lord Tactics

The fomorian portal lord moves constantly around the battlefield, grouping enemies with *evil eye* before unleashing a *feywild backblast*.

Fomorian Portal Lord Lore

Arcana DC 13: Fomorian rulers dote upon their portal lords, which are indispensible to rapid troop movements. Through a special ritual, portal lords can open portals for hours, or even days at a time.

Arcana DC 20: Portal lords are continually researching a means to bypass eladrin defenses and teleport an army directly into the heart of their cities. They're looking for those who know the teleportation codes to eladrin cities, and do whatever it takes to discover them including bargaining, theft, and espionage.

Arcana DC 25: The symbols adorning a portal lord's clothing are a special code describing every permanent teleportation circle he has ever encountered or created.

Fomorian Portal Lord **Level 16 Elite Skirmisher**
Huge fey humanoid (giant) XP 2,800
Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +13; truesight 6
HP 300; **Bloodied** 150
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

Temporal Slice (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Teleportation**
Reach 3; +21 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 force damage, and ongoing 5 force damage (save ends). The portal lord teleports 2 squares.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The portal lord makes two *temporal slice* attacks.

Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ranged 10; +19 vs. Reflex; the portal lord teleports the target 3 squares.

Feywild Backblast (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Force, Teleportation**
Close blast 5; +19 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 6 force damage. *Effect:* The portal lord teleports to any unoccupied space within or adjacent to the area.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven
Skills Arcana +20
Str 19 (+12) **Dex** 18 (+12) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 14 (+10) **Int** 24 (+15) **Cha** 10 (+8)

Fomorian Jailor

Masters of the fomorian prisons, fomorian jailors take obscene pleasure in dominating their own race, managing the failures of fomorian society far from civilized oversight.

Fomorian jailors dress in confiscated finery, flaunting their power over followers and prisoners. Jailors fancy themselves learned and cultured, insisting on intelligent discourse from visitors and charges alike. Their belts are draped in shackles; one never knows when a lesson in etiquette might be required.

Fomorian Jailor Tactics

Fomorian jailors seek to restrict battlefield movement as much as possible. They open with *lockdown* and convert enemies with *evil eye*. When bloodied, they forego subtlety and fight with the fury of a cornered animal.

Fomorian Jailor Lore

Arcana DC 20: A fomorian jailor loathes other fomorians as much as other races. To sate a jailor's violent inclinations, they are given charge of vast prisons full of fomorian outcasts, where their will is law. A jailor is accompanied by spriggan dunters that gleefully enforce its sadistic desires.

Fomorian Jailor	Level 17 Solo Controller
Huge fey humanoid (giant)	XP 8,000
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +14; truesight 6
HP 672; **Bloodied** 336	
AC 31; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 27	
Saving Throws +5	
Speed 8	
Action Points 2	
⊕ **Lash and Shackles** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 3; +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the jailor's next turn.	
⸸ **Feydark Onslaught** (standard; at-will)	
The jailor makes 3 *lash and shackles* attacks, or 4 if bloodied.	
⤙ **No Escape** (immediate reaction, when targeted by a ranged attack; at-will) ✦ **Force**	
Ranged 10; targets the triggering attacker; +20 vs. Reflex; the jailor pulls the target 9 squares into an unoccupied square adjacent to the jailor.	
✧ **Evil Eye** (minor 1/round; not usable while bloodied; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**	
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +20 vs. Will; the target takes 10 ongoing psychic damage (save ends).	
✧ **Lockdown** (standard; not usable while bloodied; recharge when no targets are affected) ✦ **Force**	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +20 vs. Reflex; the target is slowed and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both).	
✧ **Prison Break** (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +20 vs. Will; 3d12 + 4 psychic damage, and the jailor pushes the target 3 squares.	
Threatening Reach	
The fomorian jailor can make opportunity attacks against all enemies within its reach (3 squares).	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Elven
Str 30 (+19)	**Dex** 21 (+13)	**Wis** 22 (+14)
Con 24 (+15)	**Int** 26 (+16)	**Cha** 18 (+12)

Spriggan Dunter

Spriggan dunters are guards or overseers in fomorian households. They require only their hobnailed boots to kick an unruly slave or disrespectful servant into submission.

In addition to their identifying red cap, dunters dress entirely in red leather that shows the amount of blood they spill regularly.

Spriggan Dunter	Level 17 Minion Skirmisher
Small fey humanoid	XP 400
Initiative +17	**Senses** Perception +13; low-light vision
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 31; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 28	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Hobnailed Boots** (standard; at-will)	
+22 vs. AC; 8 damage (crit 13), and a grabbed, restrained, immobilized, or prone target takes 5 ongoing damage (save ends).	
Underfoot	
The spriggan dunter gains a +4 bonus to all defenses against grabbed, restrained, immobilized, and prone targets.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Elven
Skills Stealth +20	
Str 20 (+13)	**Dex** 24 (+15)	**Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 17 (+11)	**Int** 14 (+10)	**Cha** 18 (+12)

Spriggan Dunter Tactics

Spriggan dunters burst from hiding and attempt to bleed enemies dry with their *hobnailed boots*. They favor ganging up on foes that are otherwise distracted by more powerful creatures.

Spriggan Dunter Lore

Arcana DC 13: Other spriggans despise and envy spriggan dunters. The dunters have returned to the service of fomorians so long after their ancestors escaped the Feydark. However, as servants of the fomorians, dunters can bathe daily in pools of blood.

Fomorian One-Eyed Raver

Known for their brutish appearance, one-eyed ravers are tactical geniuses and leaders of fomorian warbands. In peacetime, they organize raiding parties of cyclopses and evil fey. In war, they head vast armies, where their tactical acumen shifts the tides of battle.

Wielding massive axes and clad in elaborate cyclops-forged armor, one-eyed ravers channel the loathing their race bears for other creatures into their blows.

Fomorian One-Eyed Raver	Level 18 Elite Brute (Leader)
Huge fey humanoid (giant)	XP 4,000
Initiative +11	**Senses** Perception +9; truesight 6
HP 436; **Bloodied** 218	
AC 32; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 8	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 3; +21 vs. AC; 4d6 + 8 damage (crit 4d6 + 32).	
✧ **Down, Worms** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Close blast 3; +20 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage (crit 4d6 + 20), and the target falls prone.	
✧ **Evil Eye** (minor; at-will)	
Close burst 5; one ally in the burst can make a charge attack as a free action.	
Threatening Reach	
The fomorian one-eyed raver can make opportunity attacks against all enemies within its reach (3 squares).	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Elven	
Str 30 (+19)	**Dex** 14 (+11)	**Wis** 10 (+9)
Con 28 (+18)	**Int** 22 (+15)	**Cha** 24 (+16)
Equipment hide armor, greataxe		

Fomorian One-Eyed Raver Tactics

The fomorian one-eyed raver strides into battle and attempts to keep as many enemies as possible within its *threatening reach*. It uses *evil eye* to continually reshape positions on the battlefield to its greatest advantage.

Fomorian One-Eyed Raver Lore

Arcana DC 20: Fomorian one-eyed ravers put out their normal eye and offer it to the fomorian blinders. This ritual empowers their evil eye and forever ensures the loyalty of their cyclops armies.

Fomorian Witch

Obsessed with beauty, a fomorian witch bends her magic and knowledge of alchemy to transform herself, but she cannot disguise her evil eye. Unable to perfect herself, she is driven to find or create flaws in others.

A fomorian witch resembles a beautiful eladrin or drow, albeit one of unusual size, except for her malformed evil eye. She covers the eye with a fall of hair unless threatened, which is when she reveals her deformity.

Fomorian Witch **Level 18 Elite Controller**
Huge fey humanoid (giant) XP 4,000

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +10; truesight 6
HP 340; **Bloodied** 170
AC 32; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

⊕ **Hurl Away** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
Reach 3; +22 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 8 force damage, and the witch pushes the target 3 squares.

↛ **Baleful Eye** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +22 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 6 psychic damage, and the target gains a random transformation from the list below.
1—Boarish: The target starts to resemble a boar. On each of its turns, the target must charge an enemy or take 1d10 + 3 psychic damage at the end of its turn (save ends).
2—Batfaced: The target's features become batlike, with winglike arms and short legs. It takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls and is slowed (save ends both).
3—Squirrely: The target takes on furry rodent features and becomes skittish. On each of its turns, it must move at least its speed or take 1d10 + 3 psychic damage at the end of its turn (save ends).
4—Bear-Pawed: The target's features become bearlike and clumsy. It takes a -2 penalty to all defenses and cannot shift (save ends both).
5—Buzzard-Beaked: The target starts to resemble a bald bird of prey. On each of its turns, the target must attack a bloodied, prone, stunned, or helpless enemy or take 1d10 + 3 psychic damage (save ends).
6—Wolfish: The target's features become wolflike. On each of its turns, the target must attack an enemy granting combat advantage to it or take 1d10 + 3 psychic damage at the end of its turn (save ends).

↛ **Evil Eye** (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 10; +22 vs. Will; the target takes a -2 penalty to Fortitude and ongoing 20 poison damage (save ends).

Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
A fomorian witch can alter its form to appear as a drow or eladrin of Huge size. Its evil eye remains deformed in this form.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven
Str 18 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+14) **Wis** 12 (+10)
Con 18 (+13) **Int** 28 (+18) **Cha** 24 (+16)

Fomorian Witch Tactics

The fomorian witch attempts to transform enemies as fast as possible by using *baleful eye* while poisoning the rest with toxic glare. She uses *hurl away* against enemies that move too close.

Fomorian Witch Lore

Arcana DC 20: Fomorian witches retreat from fomorian society and live in the beautiful caverns of the cyclopses. Founding their own nations in the depths of the Feydark, they work to transform everything into something more flawed than they are.

Arcana DC 25: Though a fomorian witch delights in slowly transforming humanoids into lesser beasts, which she keeps as amusing pets, some believe that honest or convincing flattery might stay her hand.

Fomorian Abyssal Eye

Many fomorians seek powers of the Abyss. Few, however, have the patience required to delve its truths without accidentally internalizing some part of the abyssal chaos.

Abyssal eyes are tattooed with runes of warding and bedecked with fetishes and charms, believing it protection against the corruption they carry within themselves. They frequently travel with a coterie of lesser demons over which they exert tenuous control.

Fomorian Abyssal Eye Level 20 Elite Controller
Huge fey humanoid (giant) XP 5,600

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +18; truesight 6
HP 376; **Bloodied** 188
AC 34; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 33
Resist 10 variable (2/encounter)
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

⊕ **Touch of Chaos** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +25 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the abyssal eye's next turn.

Evil Eye (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Charm, Psychic**
Ranged 10; targets one dazed enemy; +24 vs. Will; 1d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target charges its nearest ally or makes a basic attack against its nearest ally as a free action.

Abyssal Heart (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Fire**
Close burst 2; +24 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 8 fire damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Walking the Demonweb
The abyssal eye ignores difficult terrain and makes saving throws against immobilized, slowed, and restrained conditions at the start of its turn as well as the end of its turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Elven
Str 18 (+14) **Dex** 23 (+16) **Wis** 26 (+18)
Con 20 (+15) **Int** 22 (+16) **Cha** 12 (+11)

Fomorian Abyssal Eye Tactics

A fomorian abyssal eye attempts to turn its enemies against each other using a combination of *touch of chaos, evil eye,* and *abyssal heart*. When channeling the power of Abyss, it cares little for the well being of its allies.

Fomorian Abyssal Eye Lore

Arcana DC 27: Abyssal eyes believe that their piece of corruption works constantly to transform them into demons. Deeply superstitious, they develop a variety of obsessive-compulsive characteristics designed to stave off this transformation. From avoiding stepping on cracks to wiping their eyes and ears upon seeing or hearing certain things, they do everything in their power to follow their obsessions, even in battle.

Encounter Groups

With their domineering personalities, fomorians prefer to work with creatures they have enslaved or that willingly submit to their command.

Level 15 Encounter (XP 6,200)
2 centaur hunters (level 12 artillery)
2 cyclops hewers (level 16 soldier)
1 fomorian slavedriver (level 14 elite brute)

Level 16 Encounter (XP 7,550)
2 angels of battle (level 15 skirmisher)
1 angel of protection (level 14 soldier)
5 angels of valor veterans (level 16 minion)
1 fomorian astral scourge (level 15 elite artillery)

Level 17 Encounter (XP 9,200)
2 firebred hellhounds (level 17 brute)
1 fomorian witch (level 18 elite controller)
1 winter wolf frostbreath (level 18 artillery)

Level 20 Encounter (XP 15,200)
1 fomorian abyssal eye (level 20 elite controller)
1 goristro slave (level 19 elite brute)
3 gray wing vrocks (level 17 skirmisher)

About the Author
Andrew G. Schneider always wanted to be a wizard when he grew up, but now instead of throwing fireballs, he makes magic with words. An author and freelance game designer, he also serves as Cormyr's writing director for Living Forgotten Realms. Andrew lives in his hometown in the Washington, D.C. area.

Fantastic Terrain: Elemental Motes

By Charles Choi

illustration by Rob Alexamder

Little fires up the imagination more than a vision of the impossible, such as an island defying gravity by floating miles high up in the air. This might be why castles in the sky are so common in fantasy, from the ethereal cloud kingdoms seen in fairy tales such as Jack and the Beanstalk to the ominous flying citadels of Krynn in Dragonlance.

Islands in the sky made their debut in 4th Edition as earthmotes in the updated Forgotten Realms® setting, and now they can be unforgettable elements in your campaign as well. The awe-inspiring heights that motes often soar at carry the promise of death-defying acts of derring-do that can stick with players for years. Although the constant risk of a potentially lethal fall underlies the greatest strength of motes as a storytelling tool—spine-tingling suspense—unfortunately, it is also their greatest weakness. One wrong step on the part of either Dungeon Master or player, and a player character or valuable nonplayer character can inadvertently go hurtling into the brink. However, such challenges can be overcome easily with a little forethought.

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Motes in Your Campaign

In a game that includes monster-infested dungeons, lost islands populated by dinosaurs, and the demon-haunted depths of the Abyss, there still remains something indescribably exotic about castles hovering in the sky. It might be because that although motes are too far away to reach, they still look as if they're close enough to almost touch. In comparison, dungeons are hidden underground, lost isles are over the horizon, and other planes of existence are separated by gulfs of magic.

Motes can be a great way to include monsters and environments that you could not readily explain otherwise in your campaign setting, such as an iceberg with white dragons and frost giants floating above a blazing desert. Over the course of a campaign, the constant visible presence of a mote but the forbidding distance between it and its surroundings could lead to escalating suspense until a method is found to finally cross that gap—when the characters discover a way to fly up, for instance, or demonic hordes find a way to invade an angelic refuge.

The often remote nature of motes makes them ideal locales for refuges, strongholds, vaults, and prisons that can hide any monster or treasure you want. The fact that they are generally cut off from the rest of the world often shrouds them in mystery—who knows what they hold, or what takes place there?

On the flipside, in settings where air travel is common, such as the Eberron® setting, motes could become common ports of call. Such mote-ports can brim with adventure and serve as home to all kinds of intrigue. In the Forgotten Realms setting, for instance, the floating fortress Yaulazna is home to bands of mercenaries, smugglers, merchants and pirates.

Just as with any island, bizarre societies can pop up on motes—feral halflings or mad albino dwarves or anything else you want—potentially leading to intriguing relationships with nearby lands. One unusual possibility is that monsters on motes might not even know the rest of the world exists if the monsters have no safe way off and are prevented from seeing their surroundings by, say, banks of clouds or walls of flame. How will the inhabitants of the motes deal with any strangers that pierce such veils?

A Dungeon Master could set an entire campaign on motes. Indeed, the world could consist of nothing but motes, with no solid ground visible underneath them. Fundamentally, such a campaign might be much like a campaign set on regular islands, except that travel from one realm to another would have a more fantastic character and carry the inherent danger of plummeting to parts unknown. An excellent example of a world consisting entirely of floating islands is in Karl Schroeder's Virga series.

One could also imagine setting an entire campaign on just one mote—one not the size of a mountain, but the size of a continent. What civilization would develop on the top and bottom surfaces of such a mote or within its honeycombed interior Innerdark? How would the people of the mote treat those dwelling in its perpetual shadow on the surface of the world, or deal with other surface-dwelling civilizations?

Facts About Motes

Motes are often born from breaches between the mortal world and the Elemental Chaos, when matter explodes from that tempestuous dimension into the sky, as explained in the *Manual of the Planes*. Although the most common elemental motes are the floating mountain-sized chunks of rock known as earthmotes, other kinds exist as well, such as the semisolid pockets of cloudstuff (see below) dubbed airmotes, which storm giants and other monsters covet for their lairs. A few motes even emerge from elsewhere in the cosmos—shadowmotes, feymotes, demonmotes, hellmotes, and farmotes are not unknown.

Elemental motes often still crackle with primeval energies and surge with fire and storm. The matter they are made from is unstable, just as it is in the Elemental Chaos from which they come. Motestone and cloudstuff generally dissipates if taken away from the rest of the mote, much like the bodies of summoned creatures disappear after they die. But not everything in motes breaks down—at times, motes have stable veins of valuable ore running through them, including gold, diamonds, mithril, adamantine, and orichalcum, a naturally occurring ore rich in residuum. These ores make them valuable targets for prospectors.

The magical quality that keeps motes hovering in the air is known as elemental buoyancy. Motes and matter that comes from them are not subject to the force of the world's gravity—indeed, floating chunks of motestone can be a flying hazard before they dissipate. However, creatures, plants, and other items usually are bound to the world's gravity, although a few motes do possess their own gravity fields (see below).

Earthmotes are typically named after the terrain they support—junglemotes, desertmotes, and so on. They usually teem with life, due in part perhaps to the raw elemental energy that permeates them. Seeds of all kinds are carried in by winds and set up root, watered by clouds and growing rapidly in the abundant sunlight. Birds, insects, bats, and drakes then follow, roosting in the vegetation and caves, and in turn these all help serve as prey to help support larger flying predators such as griffons, chimeras, rocs, manticores, and dragons. Unusual herbs and rare creatures might live nowhere else but on motes, at times prompting special missions to gather them.

The epic Shift Mote ritual can force a mote to move (*Forgotten Realms Player's Guide*, page 145), but motes are normally stationary. A few do wander, acting essentially as low-orbiting moons, potentially bringing trouble and adventure wherever they go. Motes normally do not rotate, though exceptions to the rule exist (see below). Neither do they grow or shrink in size.

Unfettered Monsters

One easy way to invent flying monsters is by unfettering existing ones. In the Forgotten Realms, unfettered animals are swimming creatures no longer bound by the edicts of gravity. To create your own unfettered monsters, such as flying sharks, simply swap their swim speeds for fly speeds.

Not all islands in the sky are motes. Some, like the flying citadels of Krynn or the airborne citadels of Arkhosia (*Dungeon* #165, "Remains of the Empire"), were torn from the ground and held aloft in the air by powerful rituals. The matter from these citadels is not unstable, and it might fall as normal when knocked off.

Ten Flying Islands of Adventure

Here are ten islands in the sky that you can drop into your campaign:

1. **The Fountain of Heaven** is a junglemote from which a mighty waterfall a mile high cascades down to a desert oasis, which helps support villagers and wildlife for leagues around. However, a cruel efreet has claimed the mote as his own, causing a drought by damming the water until he receives tribute. The characters can work with local druids who provide them with giant bats, eagles, or bees to fly to the mote, where they have to deal with the efreet and his elemental and archon lackeys, as well as the strange creatures that call the floating jungle home. And what happens when a couatl or dragon decides to interfere?

2. Recently warlocks of the star pact and cosmic sorcerers have felt an unnatural wound in the fabric of the world. A new aberrant moon, **Alghul**, has emerged in the sky, upsetting the balance of the universe. The characters must deal with the fell taint minions of the rogue moon, fight their way into a corrupted mountaintop observatory they can use to find the satellite that has hidden itself from mortal eyes, and then edge their way past vacuum rifts, entropic fissures, and time wrinkles on Alghul to defeat the farmote's star spawn masters before these masters succeed in their twisted plans.

3. **Xenthar** is a forbidding octahedral flying citadel, a floating double pyramid that has long been said to serve as the ultimate vault, remote from almost any robbers. The characters secure transport there—but after surviving flights of gargoyles and countless deathtraps, that is when they find out Xenthar is not a vault but a dungeon, holding horrors that should not have been roused. And judging by the cyclopean size of its halls, it was not made for humans. . . .

4. **The Eye of Stone** drifted over the horizon one day—a giant floating red eye whose gaze petrifies whatever lies directly underneath it, leaving behind a swath of petrified forest at least 100 miles long. Is it an eye from the primordial mother of all medusas or from the largest beholder of them all? Is it a weapon deployed by a far-off kingdom to wreak havoc, or did the being who sent it away want to remove it from the hands of a still greater evil? In any case, now it's headed right for a large town, and the characters have to figure out a way to blind it. What dread creatures live on the Eye of Stone?

5. **The Neverending Storm** is a cloud kingdom that was once home to an infamous storm titan, but this mote has remained quiet for centuries. Now the mote has begun to rain lightning down with increasing frequency, and the mote itself is growing larger, threatening nearby realms. The winds surrounding the floating island make it impossible to approach from the outside, so the characters must first venture through the land below, negotiate with the dour, suspicious folk who live in the unending shadow of the clouds and fly into the eerily tranquil eye of the Neverending Storm to confront its new master.

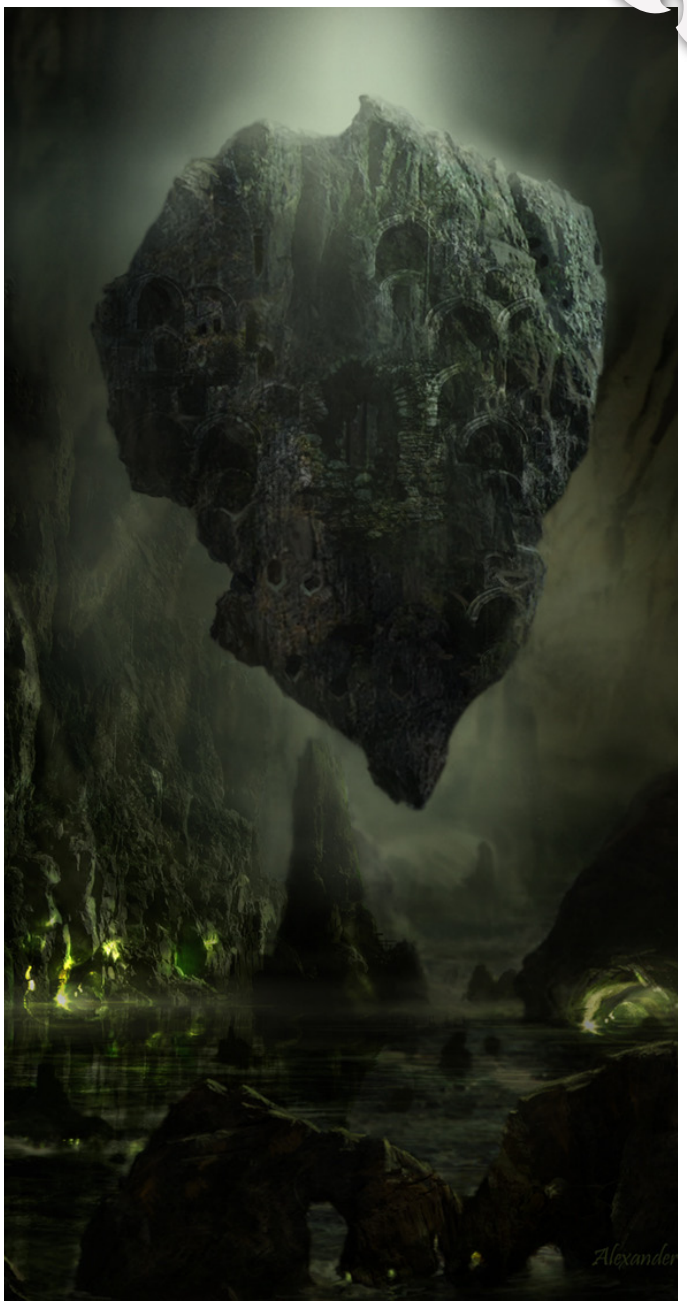
6. Deep underground in the Feydark, in the foulest of the foul caverns of the fomorians, floats the swiftly tilting prison of **Annuvan**, where captives rot in darkness and are kept alive unnaturally through abominable means to suffer for eternity. What if the characters have to stage a jailbreak? They must partner with gnome spies, deal with a paranoid turncoat cyclops, sneak past a colony of myconids, avoid the spriggan guards, and survive the mad fomorian warden of the relentlessly tumbling, disorienting mote.

7. The earthmote **Kethilir** has a stone bridge a mile long that links it to a nearby mountaintop. The goliaths who live on the mountain say the mote, once home to a secretive arcane academy, is cursed, and that recently someone or something has been raiding their cliffside villages. Will the characters wander across the bridge to Kethilir to fight what dangers lurk inside, discover what magic secrets it might hold, and rescue any captured prisoners?

8. **Ir-Lan** is a clockwork mote whose many windmills help power the elevators that lug people up and down the floating island. Until recently Ir-Lan held a bustling colony of dwarves that honeycombed the mote with tunnels and vast chambers while mining for orichalcum, but now Ir-Lan has gone silent. Did the dwarves delve too deep and uncover something that should have remained hidden? Will it be a fatal mistake to travel up by elevator?

9. Astronomers a decade ago spotted what appeared to be an island hidden on the firemote known as **Secondsun**, but mounts and vehicles cannot draw near it without perishing in flames. Now a local king has unveiled a giant catapult meant to hurl a party of daring adventurers onto this hidden island, and these folk should land safely using parachutes. Who dares fly to Secondsun? Will the fireproofing on the parachutes work? What about intrigues from neighboring kingdoms, who are convinced the king is really scheming to build a siege engine powerful enough to attack their castles from afar?

10. **Highground** is a moteport, a harbor in the sky. The floating island is covered entirely in berths for airships and ruins from the many kingdoms that once claimed Highground as their own. The mote lies over the middle of a vast wasteland or an especially perilous sea, seemingly making it the safest port of call for hundreds of miles—although the many criminals and other creatures that lurk in its nooks and crannies might belie that reputation. Every now and again some villain wants to build a coalition among the sky pirates to create an unbeatable air navy, but the dragons, couatls, and efreets that call Highground home fiercely protect the status quo.



Getting There

The journey to a mote can be adventure in and of itself—they are essentially far-off lands typically hundreds of feet up in the air after all. The common assumption is that characters fly there, and so the challenges they face would be aerial in nature—flying monsters and dangerous weather.

Still, D&D is nothing if not a game about fantasy, so why not try reaching a mote using other methods? Imagine if the characters had to get to a mote using stairways, bridges, webs, vines, ropes, ladders, elevators, catapults, rainbows, sunbeams, or moonbeams. That could greatly add to the kinds of monsters and hazards they could face on their way up.

- Perhaps the only safe way up and down is through a ritual that summons a stairway of ravens, and dread servants of the Raven Queen take umbrage with its use.
- Perhaps trolls lurk under the windy, snowy bridge.
- Perhaps giant spiders or chokers climb up and down the webs and ropes.
- Perhaps some of the vines are predatory.
- Perhaps a veritable army of kobolds occupies the stairway, bringing the risk of traps on each step.
- What happens if it rains or snows, and the rungs on the ladders start getting slippery?
- Do the elevators work all right, or are the cables in danger of snapping?
- Did the catapult aim right? Did the projectile carrying the characters hit too hard, or threaten to skitter off the edge of the mote? Did it hit the wrong spot on the mote or miss the mote entirely?
- Do angels or fell taints travel up and down the sunbeams or moonbeams?
- Does the rainbow bridge only appear three nights of the year and disappear with the morning light, necessitating very quick climbs up and down?

And of course, Dungeon Masters can still throw aerial challenges at characters going up by these methods.

Fear of Falling

All motes pose a pair of dangers for your game. The first, most obvious threat is that if characters fall and do not make the saving throw to catch themselves (*Player's Handbook*, page 284), they meet almost certain doom from their plummet. It's an ignominious way to go, and no player wants to lose a character to a lone save-or-die roll. The second, subtler risk is that even if a character survives a fall, he or she is now potentially stranded, split up from the rest of the adventure and the party with no clear way back.

Dungeon Masters can make many items available that can safely slow a character's fall—*rings of feather fall*, parachutes, giant umbrellas and so on—but they remove the character from the action. This might serve well for an exciting Hollywood finale—allowing the party to jump to safety as the mote explodes behind it, for instance—but dismal for use mid-adventure.

The best idea might be to solve the fall with combat encounters or skill checks. These can both save a character's life and provide a way for them to return.

During combat, a falling character might try clutching onto flying opponents with a grab. With a hit, instead of immobilizing the enemy, the character can try steering it, forcing the grabbed target to move (*Player's Handbook*, page 290). The character can then make his or her way back to solid ground, or perhaps leap to safety with an Acrobatics or Athletics check. The monster likely tries to escape on its turn, prompting a struggle as the character attempts to sustain the grab if he or she does not yet have a place to land. Letting go is a free action, and the character might take falling damage if appropriate. (Characters might even intentionally use this tactic to leap onto and ride monsters!) If the character's fall does not take it near a monster, you can have one attack the character to get it close enough to grab—perhaps griffons or other flying creatures regularly circle the mote as scavengers, waiting to snatch any scraps of food that fall off.

The Dungeon Master could place vines, branches, webs or other objects that characters can grab onto with a successful Acrobatics or Athletics check. They can then try Climb checks to bring them back to the rest of the party.

If a character's fall takes him or her near another character, that ally can try an Acrobatics or Athletics check, either to grab onto or be grabbed by the falling character. If a nonplayer character helped bring the party up to the mote in the first place, he or she might spot falling characters and fly by to save them.

If the mote is inhabited, it could have any number of safety measures. For instance, safety nets might be put up to catch people in case of emergencies, or flying lifeguards could regularly circle the motes.

At the very least, Dungeon Masters can have characters fall onto a ledge, bridge, or similar outcropping, or not place the mote all that high off the ground. Although they would take falling damage—see *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 44 to determine safe fall severity by character level—players would likely consider themselves lucky their characters didn't die. Dungeon Masters should feel encouraged to make a fall intimidating and difficult, but not necessarily one that sends your players back to creating new characters.

Just as trapeze artists often work with safety nets, so too might Dungeon Masters place airmotes made of cloudstuff underneath the mote to cushion any character's fall. Once that character makes his or her way up to the airmote's surface, the Dungeon Master can set up an encounter with monsters or a nonplayer character that allows the character to make his or her way back to the rest of the adventure, or possibly to a different part of the original mote.

It could even be impossible for characters to fall off the mote in your adventure if it has its own gravity field. Such a mote appears surrounded by a shimmering bubble about twice its diameter representing the limit of the field, with the center of the field at the center of the mote. Once inside this field, the world's gravity disappears and the mote's gravity takes over. The gravity is typically uniform throughout the mote, not growing any stronger or weaker at any given point. These motes are usually spherical in shape.

After deciding on what safety options a mote has for characters, a Dungeon Master should introduce these as natural parts of the background as the characters approach the mote—point out the vines and branches wrapped around it, or the circling flocks of gargoyles, or the banks of cloudstuff through which they pass. Do not mention these are safety options during play—only bring these up as opportunities where the characters can save themselves if they happen to fall. This way the choices remain in the players' hands, and they feel as if they overcame challenges through skill and luck. Nothing kills excitement more than feeling coddled from any actual risks.

The greater importance that movement now holds in D&D means that characters and monsters have more options than ever to push, pull, or slide opponents. Battles on motes could make players try out combat maneuvers they might otherwise not have considered, such as bull rushes and moving grabbed targets. On the other hand, now more risks exist that could send characters hurtling to their deaths.

Take a good hard look at what powers characters and monsters have and design your mote accordingly. You might want to include blocking terrain that allows characters to move only so far before an obstacle prevents them going over the edge. Guardrails can help reduce the chance of falling, granting a bonus to the saving throw to catch oneself, but they usually are not all that strong and could break under repeated blows or a strong enough push.

Note that all these safety options could also help Dungeon Masters save nonplayer characters who were not supposed to fall to their deaths.

Terrain and Hazards

Motes are made of motestone or solid elemental matter. Motestone is typically made of earth, but it could also be hardened fire, air, or water, although such motestone has no magical effect—motestone made of flame does not deal fire damage.

Aside from motestone, another common form of terrain on motes is cloudstuff, the light and breathable semisolid matter from which airmotes are made. Striding across cloudstuff feels like traveling across the snow—it feels a bit spongy but firm. One can walk across cloudstuff normally, dive through it at swim or burrow speeds as if it were normal terrain, or fly through it while treating it like difficult terrain. (The holes such travel makes through the cloudstuff seal up immediately behind the traveler.) Cloudstuff can also break falls—every 1 square fallen through cloudstuff reduces the distance fallen through air beforehand by 10 squares, and if the distance reduced equals the distance fallen beforehand, the fall ends and no damage is taken. Attacks that deal fire damage to squares containing cloudstuff can temporarily dissipate it, although it reforms at the end of the attacker's next turn. Creatures within cloudstuff can be targeted by attacks, although cloudstuff offers total concealment to anything within it.

As described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, swirling air eddies, flying debris, and other factors serve as difficult terrain for flying creatures, ordinary clouds provide concealment, hovering castles and other structures provide cover, air currents and whirlwinds can drag creatures along their paths, and high or extreme altitudes can tax endurance. Bolts and balls of lightning and flurries of ice can lead to blaster, lurker, and obstacle hazards. If the

mote is infused with energies from the Elemental Chaos or elsewhere, feel free to add planar hazards and terrains detailed in the *Manual of the Planes* and other places.

One especially challenging scenario that Dungeon Masters could set up for characters is a rotating earth-mote. Motes can rotate two ways: horizontally and vertically. If the mote is spinning horizontally, characters might experience dizziness and must make a Fortitude check to avoid being dazed. The faster the mote is spinning horizontally or closer the characters are to the center of this mote, the higher the DC of the check.

With a mote that is spinning vertically, the walls regularly switch places with the ceiling and floor. To simulate this, figure out how fast these switches occur—say, every 5, 10, or 500 rounds. Switches occur more rapidly the faster the mote is rotating, but they also take place more quickly closer to the center of the mote. When a switch first takes place, the surfaces the characters are standing on become steep slopes—they are difficult terrain, and an Acrobatics or Athletics check might be necessary to keep from sliding all the way down that surface or to the closest obstacle. On the next switch, the floor becomes the wall—rotate your map of the mote 90 degrees, and check if anybody experiences falling damage. The cycle of switching then resumes. (An especially complex scenario would make the mote spin both horizontally and vertically, but that might be more trouble than it's worth to Dungeon Masters.)

Final Tips

If the motes are lairs for flying creatures, be sure to make the motes' interiors take advantage of that fact by making them fully three-dimensional. For example, imagine battles over yawning pits, with vines crisscrossing the pit and covering the sides, and gargoyles flying back and forth cutting vines when expedient. Such environments are challenging for those who can't fly.

It can be surprisingly easy to make motes feel mediocre and just like any other locale on land. Be sure to highlight what is special about motes. Make them feel otherworldly, with adventurers striding through cloudstuff and avoiding unstable pockets of matter belching out elemental fire. Emphasize that they are high up in the sky—show yawning pits hundreds or thousands of feet above the ground, have them cross over gaps with rope nets and rickety bridges, and make sure that flying creatures attack from unexpected directions so that players feel at least slightly out of their element and comfort zones.

Encounter: Sturm und Drang

Encounter Level 15 (6,100 XP)

Setup

1 adult blue dragon
2 windfiend furies
1 windfiend fury hidden in the cloud

This encounter can be used in any adventure featuring an airmote. In fact, for the paragon tier, it's a great way to introduce the terrain to your characters. When you construct the terrain, you can create an environment of several air motes. Just be sure to include at least three or more semisolid fog banks around the larger airmote.

A blue dragon has taken up its lair in the clouds, along with three elementals that venerate the dragon's electric might. Depending on the adventure, the dragon might be the lord of the entire airmote, jealously hoarding the treasure the characters want, or it could be a fearsome sentry guarding the entrance of the castle of an even more powerful monster.

The banks of heavy fog offer concealment and at first obscure the party from the dragon. However, one of the windfiend furies constantly patrols between embankments, looking for intruders. The other windfiend furies are hidden—one within the cloudstuff, the other in a small fog bank.

When you set up this area, the characters see only the dragon and empty fog banks. Another, smaller fog bank hides one of the windfiend furies, but the characters cannot see it until they've engaged the dragon.

When the characters enter the area, read:

Wisps of white fog curl around your ankles as you stride across the dark gray cloud. Banks of heavy fog partially obscure your view of this large area, but around the corner of one you see a large blue-scaled tail.

Perception Check
DC 18: *You hear whistling winds and low thunder drawing closer to you, as if a storm was approaching.*
DC 23: *Deep within the small fog bank, you spy flashes of lightning.*
DC 25: *You also spot flashes of lightning within the gray cloud.*

Tactics

If the characters come within the line of sight of the windfiend fury hidden in the small fog bank, it waits until they draw near for a surprise attack. If the characters try and burrow through the cloudstuff instead, they might run afoul the windfiend fury lurking out of sight there.

If the dragon is alerted to the party's presence, it takes to the air immediately, spending an action point to use *frightful presence* and then following up with its *breath weapon*. The windfiend furies move to surround the party, teleporting with *storm burst* to keep characters boxed in.

If the party bloodies the dragon, it blasts the characters with its *bloodied breath* and then dives into the cloudstuff. It can burrow underneath at a speed of 5, lurking below until its *breath weapon* recharges or emerging to make *lightning burst* attacks. The dragon can also choose to engage the party directly with *draconic fury*; the round afterward, it tries to grab the weakest-looking character to drag it down into the cloudstuff to rip him or her to shreds.

Characters that attempt to hide in the heavy fog or the cloudstuff quickly discover that although they offer concealment, they do not offer cover.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Light streaming down from above brightly illuminates the entire area.

Ceiling: The area is exposed to the open air.

Heavy Fog: Squares of heavily obscured fog should be scattered around the area. The heavy fog reaches up to 10 feet high. Any attack that deals more than 5 fire damage in a square where there is heavy fog dissipates it permanently.

Cloudstuff: The entire floor of the airmote is made of cloudstuff. One can walk across cloudstuff normally, dive through it at swim or burrow speeds as if it were normal terrain, or fly through it as if it is difficult terrain. (The holes such travel makes through the cloudstuff seal up immediately behind the traveler.) Attacks that deal fire damage to squares that contain cloudstuff can temporarily dissipate it, although it reforms at the end of the attacker's next turn. Creatures within cloudstuff can be targeted by attacks, although cloudstuff offers total concealment to anything within it.

Adult Blue Dragon **Level 13 Solo Artillery**
Large natural magical beast (dragon) XP 4,000

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 655; **Bloodied** 327
AC 30; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 27
Resist 20 lightning
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 15
Action Points 2

Gore (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage, plus 1d6 lightning damage, and the target is pushed 1 square and knocked prone.

Claw (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage.

Draconic Fury (standard; at-will)
The dragon makes a gore attack and two claw attacks.

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
The dragon targets up to three creatures with its lightning breath; the first target must be within 10 squares of the dragon, the second target within 10 squares of the first, and the third target within 10 squares of the second; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 10 lightning damage. *Miss*: Half damage. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied, encounter) ✦ **Lightning**
The dragon's breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Frightful Presence (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +18 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect*: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Lightning Burst (standard, at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Area burst 3 within 20; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 lightning damage. *Miss*: Half damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Athletics +22, Insight +13, Nature +13

Str 23 (+12)	**Dex** 16 (+9)	**Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 19 (+10)	**Int** 13 (+7)	**Cha** 14 (+8)

Windfiend Fury **Level 12 Controller**
Large elemental magical beast (air, earth) XP 700

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +10
Forceful Zephyr aura 3; the windfiend fury slides each creature that starts its turn within the aura 1 square.
HP 123; **Bloodied** 61
AC 26; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 lightning, 15 thunder
Speed 0, fly 8 (hover)

Flying Debris (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage.

Lightning Strike (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 10; +16 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 5 lightning damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the windfiend fury's next turn.

Storm Burst (standard; at-will) ✦ **Teleportation, Thunder**
Close burst 2; +16 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 5 thunder damage.
Effect: The windfiend fury teleports to any space adjacent to the burst's area of effect.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Primordial

Str 17 (+9)	**Dex** 21 (+11)	**Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 19 (+10)	**Int** 6 (+4)	**Cha** 16 (+9)

About the Author

Charles Choi will come in one of the pre-chosen forms. During the rectification of the Vuldrini, he came as a large and moving Torg; then, during the third reconciliation of the last of the McKetrick supplicants, they chose a new form for him, that of a giant Slor. Currently he lives in New York where he works as a journalist. This is his first article for D&D, and he hopes you like it.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

Tarmel Drouth, Outcast Noble

by Ed Greenwood ✦ illustration by Christine MacTernan

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In elder days, the nobles of Cormyr—including the royal Obarskyrs—were notorious for having many bastard offspring. Most of these turnshields, as they were called in polite company, were sent away, often to other noble households where they were reared as servants ignorant of their parentage. At other times, they were packed off to noble relatives in distant lands where they were trained as merchant traders or skilled workers who could enrich the family. In either case, such treatment kept the unsightly relations in reserve, just in case no legitimate heirs survived to continue the family line.

Many turnshield sons and daughters became valued family members. Some were appointed the keepers of family accounts, and others the leaders of family guards. A third category of these children were trained as the heads of illicit family strike forces. These groups were used to settle scores with other nobles, trade rivals, creditors, and pushy would-be nobles, as well as to deter overly nosy War Wizards, Highknights, and Harpers.

A large number of turnshields, however, became coinless wastrels, wandering distant realms as forgotten kin. Some were even paid to stay far from

Cormyr. They usually hated their noble connections, but lacked the will or means to take any revenge on those who'd spurned them. But a rare few turn-shield outcasts have, as the saying goes, "more fire in their hearts," and become real problems. The most successful—or notorious—to recently rise to public notice in Cormyr is Tarmel Drouth, the "Doom of All Dark Houses." This rather dramatic sobriquet has awakened interest, causing one question to be asked increasingly often in Sembia and Amn these days: "Who is Tarmel Drouth?"

Who is Tarmel Drouth?

Tarmel Drouth (pronounced "TAR-mell Drooth") is the bastard son of Rancelair Illance ("RAN-sell-air ILL-ance"), the middle brother of three Illance heirs. House Illance is one of the oldest, wealthiest, and most powerful Cormyrean noble families, and Rancelair is handsome, athletic (a good rider and swordsman), and a rake. He chases thrills and beautiful women of all ages and social standing, eats and drinks heavily, and spends money as if, to quote one friend, "his purse is an endless gushing waterfall of coins."

Tarmel inherited Rancelair's looks and character, but also his grandfather Meldrauvyn's fiery temper. He spent his youth trying to outdo his sire's wild ways. After several hushed-up murders and incidents of arson, not to mention countless thefts and brawls, Meldrauvyn decided Tarmel was too dangerous to remain in Cormyr or be associated with House Illance. This decision was arrived at despite Rancelair's support of his wayward son; Rancelair admired Tarmel's recklessness and found it useful in overshadowing his own misdeeds.

So as his nineteenth spring began, Tarmel Illance was abruptly told he was no longer welcome on any land or in any building that House Illance owned, and that he was being stripped of his family name. Use of the Illance name in the future would be met with exile. Under a Crown warrant that Lord Meldrauvyn Illance had obtained with no difficulty whatsoever, Tarmel was henceforth the officially fatherless "Tarmel Drouth," the son of his beautiful but sickly mother, a tankard lass in the poor western dockside end of Suzail.

Defiant Firebrand

Abruptly impoverished and homeless, Tarmel did not take his downfall quietly. He immediately attempted to burn down the Illance stables in Suzail (an act foiled by a watchful Illance house wizard) and fled straight to the Royal Court, possibly to give himself an alibi, not knowing the swiftly-growing fire he'd set had been quenched. There Tarmel loudly denounced both the Illance family and Cormyr's nobility in general as decadent and "destructive to the realm and all folk in their life-twisting selfishness."

Though many commoners might privately agree with this judgment, declaiming it won Drouth no sympathy. Bluntly told by senior courtiers to find honest work and devote himself to becoming a good citizen rather than a proud one, he was invited to depart the building. War Wizards and guards firmly escorted him outside and warned him not to cause trouble.

Drouth stormed off, departing the city—but somehow eluded the scrutiny of the War Wizards assigned to watch him. He then made his way to Waymoot, where he stole a wagon of firewood after getting its drovers drunk, returned to Suzail in disguise, and set several fires. Then he broke into his mother's rented room, forcibly seized her few coins, and fled the city again. The Crown promptly took Asla Drouth into the palace as a maid under a new name, suspecting Tarmel would kill her the next time he came seeking money.

Crown agents (deliberately) and Purple Dragons and courtiers (through normal gossip) spread word of Drouth's arson attempts. Suzail—and, slowly, the rest of Cormyr—reached the shared judgment that Drouth was a danger to all.

Dangerous Dastard

On foot, Tarmel Drouth wandered into Sembia, stealing tools as he went, which he then sold to buy meals, a cloak, and sturdy boots. In the Sembian uplands he lived wild for a month on the penned game of farms and hunting lodges ... and schemed. He developed the habit of murmuring aloud to himself almost constantly (though he can keep silent when skulking), and he nursed his hatreds. Tarmel's fury at his treatment deepened into a hatred of the Crown and all the nobility of Cormyr, not just House Illance. He did not want to turn his back on them and take up a new life; he wanted to return to the Forest Kingdom and humble them all.

Tarmel became a roving brigand of the Sembian forests, murdering to gain food, drink, and what he needed for his planned return to Cormyr.

By late summer he was ready, having obtained a new wardrobe of everyday garments, two horses, a small wagon, enough handkegs of pickles from a warehouse outside Ordulin to fill the wagon and conceal a false bottom holding some poison and weapons—notably several crossbows. Then he set forth for Cormyr. Unshaven and poorly dressed, he didn't resemble the dashing young noble who'd fled the realm months earlier, and he easily passed border inspections, heading not for Suzail but rather for Stag Well, the upland family mansion where the Illances always gathered at the tail end of summer.

There, on a warm, moonless summer night, with his crossbows and poisoned quarrels, Tarmel Drouth sought his revenge. Again, he accomplished less than he thought he'd manage, hastening from the mansion before dawn, believing that Rancelair and Meldrauvyn Illance—and an army of servants, guards, and at least two house wizards—lay dead behind him. In truth, no quarrels had hit Meldrauvyn, and Rancelair would recover, though Tarmel had slain the wizards and a dozen household guards and servants. Drouth carried off three chests full of gold and silver coins, the family cache he knew was kept at Stag Well, and he headed straight back to Sembia.

Luck was with him. The Illances had intended to host certain wealthy Sembians at Stag Well to transact some shady business. Those visitors panicked at what they found and hastily buried most of the dead, turning away other visitors so skillfully that it was days before word of the attack got out. At the same time, another noble family was attacked by brigands near Marsember, drawing attention away from the upland roads—and Tarmel Drouth disappeared into Sembia, unnoticed.

The Gods Take a Hand

Wealthy enough to now live however he desired, and wise enough to know his depredations in upland Sembia couldn't continue forever, Drouth hastened to Yhaunn and rented modest lodgings under an assumed name. There he plotted anew, hiring bands of adventurers to rob warehouses of goods owned by Cormyrean nobles and spy on local factors, or trade agents, of Forest Kingdom nobles. He was careful, reasoning—correctly—that Sembian authorities wouldn't hamper someone striking only against Cormyr's interests.

Drouth soon noticed a curious thing; no matter how much he dipped into the coin-chests, they mysteriously refilled themselves. At first he was dumbfounded, then afraid that he was being framed for something, because who in money-grasping Sembia would *give* coins, rather than take them? He moved the coins to the roof, hiding them in false drainpipes. But the replenishment continued, and Drouth came to believe the gods themselves were renewing his wealth, because his cause was "right, and ripe to succeed."

Unbeknownst to him, his unseen benefactors are actually individuals descended from Cormyrean nobles exiled in the past, now successful in Westgate and Sembia. They sponsor Drouth in hopes that many of Cormyr's nobles (including the ruling Obarskyrs) will be brought down—or at least a good number murdered—by the crazed, obsessed Tarmel Drouth.

Drouth Riding High

Drouth is cunning. He still likes to visit Cormyr often, but he keeps well away from the outrages done by adventurers he hires through Sembian intermediaries. Drouth works elaborate schemes to frame Cormyrean nobles for various misdeeds, as well as to spy on nobles to expose their real dark secrets. He now avoids arson, and is biding his time until he can make certain of killing each and every one of the Illances who spurned him. In the meantime, he's happy to bring what misfortune he can to the Crown of Cormyr and slaughter or discredit as many nobles from that nation as possible.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. There are still a few rooms in his house with space left to pile up papers in . . .

Episode 25: Let's Call the Whole Thing Off

BY JAMES WYATT

illustration by Wayne England

Andrew Finch offered a little tidbit of DMing advice that appears on page 147 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*: "Know where you are going with your campaign. Don't be afraid to end it when you get there." It's a handy bit of advice aimed at making sure that DMs don't let their campaigns flounder along with no goal or destination in mind, long past the time when interest and enthusiasm in the campaign has waned to nothing.

But sometimes, I am realizing this month, you need to call a campaign to a halt before you get there.

I've been writing this column for almost two years now (starting in June 2008). I didn't actually start running my Greenbrier campaign until last January. We played for a while, long enough for the characters to hit 3rd level, but now it's been several months since we sat around a conference room table and played. I'm coming to the sad realization that it's time to call the whole thing off.

There are a lot of reasons, a lot of things going on. A host of factors have contributed to the fact that we haven't played in months—everything from the press of work as we labor to get products out the door to the simple fact that sometimes it's nice to go out to lunch on a Friday instead of lingering around the office, even if you are playing D&D.

But the biggest factor in my mind is simply the disconnect between the campaign I've been brainstorming and describing in this column and the reality of what a one- or two-hour session at lunchtime can offer. That's something I've hinted at before in this column, but I'm finally forced to admit that it's a big enough impediment to my enjoyment of the campaign that I'm willing to scrap the campaign and start over.

I play in another lunchtime game, run by Mike Mearls, which meets (theoretically) every Tuesday and Thursday for one hour. I enjoy that game a great deal. Mike is running us through the Temple of Elemental Evil, tweaked here and there but still using the original maps and many of the original villains. It's a blast, even though it can be hard to keep track of what we're doing and what's going on around us from week to week, especially when illness or conventions or deadlines keep us away from the table for a couple weeks at a time. So my problem isn't really with the lunchtime game format in itself.

The problem is that this format isn't conducive to the kind of game I want to run and the kind of campaign I've been outlining in this column. The sessions are too short, the overall pace is too slow, and the environment (a conference room at work, with the clock ticking toward everyone's next meeting at 1:00) isn't friendly to kicking back and getting immersed in the world of the game.

So I'm calling it off.

Next month, I'm going to start a new campaign. This time, I'm going to try to actually get the group assembled and ready to play before I've written a year's worth of columns.

That's a hard decision to make. The folks in my game are co-workers and friends, and while none of them has been beating down my nonexistent office door to ask when we're playing next, I know they enjoy the game and will miss it. I've put a lot of work into the campaign, as you've seen over the last two years, and it would be sad to just toss it away.

But that's what I'm going to do.

There's at least one other strong option, of course. I could try to transform this group into a monthly weekend group (more practical for me than another weekly evening group). We could pick up right where we left off but playing five-hour sessions every month. We could play all the way through my planned Greenbrier campaign arc in a new format, no problem.

Why not do that? Well, for a couple of reasons. One is that I know some of my players will have scheduling problems with that (we do have lives outside the office). The more significant one is that I've been writing about Greenbrier for two years, and I'm ready for something new. You might have picked up on that in my last few columns. I've always been the kind of DM who experiences frustration that I have more ideas for campaigns I want to run than I have time to run them in. I also have the luxury (which not many of you share, I realize) of having more people I want to play with than I can fit around a single table.

So next month, I'm going to start a new campaign. This time, I'm going to try to actually get the group assembled and ready to play before I've written a year's worth of columns. I'm going to aim to put more of the "Group Storytelling" principles from Chapter 1 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide 2* into practice in this campaign and let the players have more voice in the direction and story of the campaign.

I'll end this installment with a few more-or-less random thoughts about ending a campaign when it's not going the way you wanted.

Ten Warning Signs

Is it time to scrap your campaign and start over? Scan down this list of warning signs. If more than three or four of them are true for your game, it might be time to call it off.

1. Players keep missing your games. Life interferes with gaming all the time, but if it becomes chronic, the reason might be dwindling levels of interest rather than increasing levels of conflict.
2. You keep canceling your game. Again, life gets in the way, but it's worth asking yourself how much of a priority you're making your campaign.
3. You have no energy for the campaign—you'd rather work on something else (maybe notes for a new campaign) than prepare for your next session. Do what gives you energy.
4. Your players can't keep track of what they're supposed to be doing in the game. That can be a problem if you play only monthly, but again, if it's a chronic problem, it could indicate that your players aren't invested in the story.
5. Your players start trying to hijack the campaign in a new direction. This can be good, if you're flexible enough to incorporate their desires and let the campaign go in the direction they're steering it. At least it's a pretty clear indication that your players are looking for something different.
6. Your players start getting uncooperative or destructive. This is a less creative version of #5—at least if they're trying to steer the game in a particular direction, they're communicating what they'd like to see out of the game. If they just start being contrary, what they're really saying is, "This isn't working for me."
7. You have an awesome idea for your next campaign that you can't wait to start. This is similar to #3. If you're more excited about your next campaign than you are about the one you're running now, maybe you're trying to stretch your current game beyond its healthy lifespan.
8. You can't keep track of the characters and events in your campaign any more. If you can't keep it all straight, your players almost certainly can't either. If you don't care enough to keep track of it, it's time to start fresh.

9. You keep doing things other than D&D. It's common for D&D groups to take short breaks from the ongoing campaign to play one-shot adventures, a board game, or try a different RPG. If the "breaks" are becoming the main fare, it's possible that the campaign isn't worth coming back to.

Don't have one last session where you kill all the characters, announce that they've failed and the world is ending, and tell the players that the campaign is over.

10. Your players aren't invested in their characters. Maybe they're coming to you asking to replace their current characters with something out of *Player's Handbook* 3. Maybe they're steering their characters into suicidal situations. Or maybe they're just listless about their characters' backgrounds, motivations, and goals. In any event, it might be time to let them start fresh.

Wrapping It Up

As the *Dungeon Master's Guide* says, it's better to end a campaign "with a thrilling final quest and a glorious victory than to let it fizzle out." If you have no energy for your current campaign, it might be tough summoning the energy to wrap up the campaign with a bang. That's how I'm feeling right now, but I've also been pretty sick for the last few days and I'm low on energy anyway. I'm hoping that once I feel better, I'll be able to get everyone together for a last session that brings the campaign to at least a vaguely satisfying conclusion.

Although, in this particular case, I'm not sure how necessary that is. Part of the reason I'm letting the campaign die is that I don't feel like the players are especially invested in the story—heck, I'm not sure I am anymore. Maybe they don't care whether I let them re-consecrate the last altar and tell them that they've repaired the seals, preventing further Far Realm influence from seeping into the world. I'll have to ask them about that.

If you're going to have a last session, make sure it's exciting and ends on a high note. Don't have one last session where you kill all the characters, announce that they've failed and the world is ending, and tell the players that the campaign is over. That will just leave them grumpy and dissatisfied with you and the game and unlikely to come back for another try.

If your next campaign is going to involve the same group of players, talk to them about the change. Talk about how to wrap up the current campaign and what the next campaign will look like. As the DMG suggests, it can be a lot of fun to build the new campaign on the legends of the current one, advancing the world's timeline by a hundred or a thousand years and making the current campaign a part of the epic history of the old one. That helps the players feel that what they did in the old campaign mattered, and it's not just getting thrown aside in favor of your new great idea.

It's also worth asking whether someone else would like a turn in the DM's seat, particularly if you've been low on enthusiasm for preparing and running your game. Even just having someone else run a published adventure for a few sessions while you work on getting the new campaign ready can give you a much-needed respite and train another DM, which is good for the hobby as a whole.

Writing this column has made me a little blue, but I find that there's a sure-fire cure. Watch Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers sing "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" in the movie *Shall We Dance*, and then launch into a tap-dance number . . . on roller-skates. You can find the dancing part, at least, on YouTube.

Next time: Something new!

About the Author

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Split the Party

by Mike Mearls
Illustration by Raven Mimura

One of the tantalizing aspects of the skill challenge system is its ability to handle situations where the D&D rules have traditionally proven troublesome. This month's installment looks at splitting up the party and the role skill challenges can play when the action takes place across several different areas. Running a game where the characters are scattered across a city or kingdom can prove difficult for a DM. A skill challenge helps make it more manageable by giving you a clear structure for managing the action.

Split the Party

Breaking up the party is normally a bad tactic for adventurers. After all, who wants to be stuck alone when a red dragon shows up? On the other hand, there are times when it makes sense for the characters to scatter to the four winds. During a siege, the characters might split up to reinforce each gate into a city. When chasing a fleeing criminal, the characters might split up to cover each escape route. When you break up the party, you have a chance to let each character shine and you can create more dramatic, tense scenes. With each character on their own, success or failure at a skill check, a good decision or a bad one, or a successful attack, has a huge effect on each individual's situation.

The benefits of splitting the party when it comes to skill challenges have been covered earlier in this column's history, but there is one big point worth remembering. When you split the party, it becomes impossible for one character with a high skill bonus to dominate the action. Each character must fend for himself, spreading the burden of success across the party.

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When to Split the Party

Breaking up the party works best in situations where combat is unlikely to play a role in the action. When delving into a dungeon, the characters want to face traps, monsters, and other hazards as a group. Spending time in a city like Waterdeep is a different matter. The city watch is on hand to deal with trouble, and the characters can rest assured that they can avoid pickpockets and thugs if they stick to the nicer parts of town. Even in the rough areas of town, open, deadly combat is rare. The players feel a bit safer splitting up.

When in a town or city, splitting up the party has a number of big payoffs. The obvious advantage is that you can handle a lot of different actions at once. The entire party doesn't need to go with the wizard to buy ritual components and then tag along with the cleric to visit the temple for advice on dealing with the vampire count of the eastern forest.

Lone characters both receive a lot of spotlight time and have more freedom to act as they wish. These advantages are subtle, but they have a big benefit at the table.

The importance of a character's decisions is magnified when that character is on his own. Thogar the barbarian might hate having to sit and listen to NPCs prattle on. When Thogar goes off by himself to track down a criminal, he can put his fist into the face of the scumbag innkeeper who tries to throw him off the trail. Thogar's player doesn't need to worry about stepping on the bard's Diplomacy skill check or the pacifist cleric's sensibilities. When he is on his own, Thogar's player has the chance to indulge Thogar's personality and impulses. Freeing players from the group, even if just for a short time, gives them the chance to have a little fun or try options that might not be the best choice for the group but are right for them.

Structuring the Skill Challenge

Putting together a skill challenge that splits the party requires a couple of different things. What sort of obstacles do the characters face? You need to decide how the characters' individual efforts combine. Are the characters after the same goal but need to split up to find it? Or are the characters pursuing different, separate, yet related goals?

You need to think about the different obstacles the characters face. Keeping in mind that this style of skill challenge caters to giving each character the spotlight, try to match one challenge or obstacle to each character. The wizard with good Arcana and History skill bonuses might need to visit an ancient library to research a strange, new type of devil the characters have encountered. Tailor those challenges to fit the characters' skills.

Keep in mind that you don't need to create a skill challenge for each character. In the example given above, Thogar might be happy bashing a few thugs. You can create a combat encounter for one character using XP equal to a monster of that character's level. A one-on-one fight can grow boring, however, so try using several minions or a single, lower level monster backed up by minions instead, to keep things interesting. As you'll see later, you want a combat encounter that runs for a number of rounds.

With your obstacles in mind, consider whether they link together. Are the characters off following their own goals? If so, then design the skill challenges or encounters using the advice throughout this series, plus some of the tips below.

On the other hand, if the characters are working together toward some larger plan and the individual encounters link together, then you should consider how each individual character's success relates to the larger whole. This can be as simple as each successful skill challenge or encounter providing one clue or piece of a larger puzzle. When the characters come together, each individual success leaves them better equipped to deal with the next phase of the adventure.

For example, let's say the characters need to investigate whether a nobleman in town has links to an evil cult. The characters might split up to research the noble's family, spy on the noble as he goes about his business, question the thugs at the docks whom the noble works with, and break into his villa to search for clues.

Thinking ahead, you know that total success allows the characters to learn of the hidden temple outside of town where the noble meets with the evil high priest. Each skill challenge, if successful, provides a fragment needed to move on to the next step:

- Research reveals that the noble owns land outside of town;
- Spying shows that he is planning a short trip out of the city in three days;
- The thugs have all traveled with the noble to a village to the east of town;
- The break-in turns up floor plans of a building that has been modified to include a hidden cellar.

Those four clues, taken together, tell the characters that they need to look outside of town, to the east, for a villa with a secret cellar, and that they have three days before the nobleman leaves for that place. With all those clues, the characters can set a trap for him. With only a partial picture, they might need to trail him or risk a direct confrontation with the noble and his followers.

A Challenge for One

Designing a skill challenge for one character follows the same methods as suggested in earlier installments of this series with only a few changes.

Aim for a complexity 1 skill challenge.

Offering a variety of approaches and skills for each character makes the action more compelling and interesting. If only one character can act, then forcing that character to do the same thing several times is boring. Take advantage of the range of DCs to force characters to make checks they normally would avoid. Such checks are exciting, because they force a character out of his comfort zone

For example, let's say that the party's wizard needs to track down some information at a local library as described above. When the wizard arrives, he notices that a sorcerer who works with the noble is at the library. In addition to making Arcana and History checks to find information on the noble's landholdings, there are other skills you can bring into the action:

- Bluff or Diplomacy might be needed to convince the librarian in charge of deeds and records to open up a locked chamber of records.
- Stealth allows the wizard to avoid the notice of the noble's sorcerer ally.
- Athletics might allow the wizard to navigate a creaky ladder to reach a book atop a towering shelf.

You can introduce these complications as a character explores the library and perhaps give the player the flexibility to come up with a plan or pick the most applicable skill check. When the sorcerer wheels around a corner in the stacks, the wizard could make a Bluff check to pass himself off as a simple sage, a Stealth check to slip into the shadows, or an Acrobatics check to duck around the corner. By giving characters options, you make the spotlight all the more fun and let a player get into his character's role.

In most cases, avoid secondary skill uses. With the action focused on one character, it's best to keep the action driving forward all the time. Secondary skills are best when the party as a whole tackles a challenge and characters can aid one another.

Keep in mind that, at complexity 1, the characters make at most seven skill checks. Try to avoid situations where one character finishes too soon or too late. This reason is why, if you throw a combat encounter at a character, you should use minions and lower-level normal monsters. That mix gives a character the chance to fight for a few rounds rather than simply knocking out a lone minion. A fight with a higher-level foe might drag on long after everyone else has finished their skill challenges.

At the Table

Once you have the individual obstacles ready to go, it's time to run them at the table. Managing multiple skill challenges is easier than you might think. Since you only need to track successes and failures, you have less to record than in a combat.

The easiest method is to go around the table, describing the scene and resolving a skill check for one character before moving on to the next character. If one character is in a fight, you can run one round of the battle before moving on to the next character.

This method keeps things moving while also building tension, as each player watches the other skill challenges unfold. You need to engage everyone and allow the entire group to see the individual encounters.

An alternative is running one skill challenge to completion before moving on to the next. This works only if success or failure in one skill challenge influences action in the next one. That method can work, but if you use it, try to avoid running more than two or three challenges in a row. Any more than that leaves characters at the first skill challenge sidelined from the action for too long.

Next Month

As has been the pattern in this series, next month's installment features a sample skill challenge built using the advice presented here.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Designer for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include *Player's Handbook®* 3, *Hammerfast*™, and *Primal Power*™.